THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A STUDY OF THE NOVELS AND AESTHETICS OF MICHEL BUTOR

by

© MARY LYDON

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A Study of the Novels and Aesthetics of Michel Butor" submitted by Mary Lydon in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in French.

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ABSTRACT

Since the publication of *Mobile* in 1962, Michel Butor has been associated with books which depart sharply from what readers have long regarded as the norm. This has frequently produced an adverse reaction from public and critics alike, and as with new developments in art generally, the classics are invoked as a screen against these innovations which seem to threaten accepted values.

Ironically, in Butor's case, it is his own earlier work which is put to this use, and the effect is doubly deleterious. It obscures the profound originality of the first suite of four novels and by setting up a rigid boundary between them and what followed, it denies the organic nature of Butor's *oeuvre*. The achievement which his first books represent is therefore either exaggerated for the wrong reasons, or else underplayed in favour of his latest experiments.

It is the aim of this study to right the balance and to provide an overview of Butor's work as a whole, following the example of his own criticism (which has always maintained the equilibrium between the great works of the past and the innovations of our contemporaries), showing in the process that the later works teach us how to read their predecessors, and vice versa; that all his books from

Passage de Milan onwards are highly original works of art, and that the innovative technique which has distinguished him as a writer from the beginning, is the necessary expression of an underlying *métaphysique* which informs his entire work.

The writing of Michel Butor testifies not only to a highly developed aesthetic sense but to an outstandingly sincere and courageous effort to come to grips with the complexity of life in the twentieth century and to give expression to the spirit of our age.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. The Novel and Novelty 1

II. The Uses of Criticism 38

III. A Commonplace Book 83

IV. The Music of Time 149

V. Train of Thought 214

VI. Degrees of Affinity 259

VII. New Departures 327

VIII. The Smithy of the Soul 408

IX. Words and Images 488

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 540

APPENDIX 1. 562

List of Abbreviations

Works by Michel Butor

ET	L'Emploi du temps
HE	Histoire Extraordinaire
PA	Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe
PM	Passage de Milan
R 1	Répertoire I
R 2	Répertoire II
R 3	Répertoire III

Other Works

Entretiens	Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Michel Butor*

The Novel and Novelty

The good ended happily and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means.

Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest

The "new novel" is no longer new. Indeed it is startling to reflect that some of its earlier manifestations will soon be twenty years old; a fact which leads to the paradoxical conclusion that while to be new is necessarily an ephemeral state, to be a "new novel" is a relatively enduring one. But what precisely do we mean by the term "new novel"? It has been variously suggested that it is in fact neither new, nor a novel nor a "new novel".

For example, it has been proposed that every novelist of quality, in whatever age he lived, has produced a "new novel" - Flaubert in 1857, Proust in 1910 - implying that *La Modification* or *La Jalousie* constitute no more radical a break with tradition than did *Madame Bovary* or *Du coté de Chez Swann*. This argument seeks to undermine the notion that the "new novel" is a phenomenon peculiar to the twentieth century and carries the further suggestion that it is only new in the measure that all true works of art are new.[1] On the other hand the collectivity implied by the term "new novel" has been denied by many of its alleged practitioners, who dispute the existence of an *Ecole de Minuit*, *Ecole du regard* or any other - Robbe-Grillet being the most vociferous spokesman on this issue.

Yet if we take three contemporary writers who have expounded their views on the novel at some length - Butor, Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet - it will be seen that several of those views are held in common, or are at least complementary to each other. On the question of the importance of form in the novel, for example, both Butor and Sarraute insist on the obligation which falls on the novelist of good faith to seek new forms which will be comprehensive of newly emerged or emerging realities.[2] Of the novelist who neglects this duty, Butor says severely that " ... son oeuvre en fin de compte est un poison." (R 1, 9). For Sarraute, techniques which in the hands of a Balzac served to "inciter le lecteur a accéder à une vérité qui se conquiert de haute lutte.",[3] have become in the hands of his twentieth century imitators a dangerous concession to the reader's laziness. She seeks to turn the tables on those who accuse the new novel of "formalism", while opting for the allegedly realistic traditional novel, by showing that the labels ought really to be reversed, since the "realists" in their slavish imitation of established forms are the real "formalists":

> "Il est bien clair pourtant que la réalité n'est pas leur principale affaire. Mais la forme, toujours, celle que d'autres ont inventée et dont une force magnétique les empêche de jamais pouvoir s'arracher.",[4]

while their failure to invent new forms renders them incapable of writing realistically. Robbe-Grillet has expressed his complete agreement with this judgment:

> "Ils sont formalistes parce qu'ils ont accepté une forme toute faite, sclérosée, qui n'est plus qu'une formule, et parce qu'ils s'accrochent à cette carcasse sans chair."

And he insists that " ... la forme est invention, et non recette."[5] That Butor shares this view is borne out by his declaration that:

> "L'invention formelle dans le roman, bien loin de s'opposer au réalisme comme l'imagine trop souvent une critique à courte vue est la condition *sine qua non* d'un réalisme plus poussé." (R 1, 9).

The techniqueswhich had been developed to provide adequate expression of the *weltanschauung* of the nineteenth century are manifestly ill-adapted to our age, in which positivism has been ousted by relativism. But there is another aspect to the situation and that is that writer and reader alike are necessarily "en situation dans une civilisation mentale, dans une littérature qui ne peuvent être que celles du passé."[6] The norms of the past serve not only as yardsticks for the present, they have helped to form it; it is made, to some extent, in their image. Thus the flowering of the genre in the nineteenth century has established the novel of that era both as touchstone and blueprint for the novel of today. In consequence, the most entrenched resistance to the innovative novel may be expected from those who are specialists (to a varying degree) in the novel - novelists, critics and inveterate novel-readers.

The production of novels in France is prodigious, and as Butor has pointed out, most people will have read quantities of them, significantly not precisely contemporary novels, but more probably those written about thirty years ago. Any person who has passed through the secondary schools system will have had to study certain writers of former times and they will have marked him, even if they also bored him. "Nous sommes baignés dans une atmosphére romanesque.", (R 3, 7), one which is slightly behind the times in which we live. Butor has expressed the problem with characteristic subtlety:

> "Pour moi un des problèmes fondamentaux c'est de *devenir* contemporain. On croit être contemporain de son propre temps, et en réalité c'est faux, on est toujours en retard sur son propre temps; dans la littérature en particulier, on a en général cent ans de retard. Pour moi, un des problèmes essentiels c'est de réussir à diminuer ce retard, donc à devenir le contemporain de mon propre temps, à devenir le contemporain de moi-même." [7]

Readers are apt to complain when a similar effort is required of them, and the very violence of their reaction when confronted with the new novel is an indication that it is indeed new. Here one must disagree with Léon S. Roudiez, whose assertion that the new novel is no more than "a figment of critics' imaginations"[8] is altogether too sweeping, though it probably contains a grain of truth. The French literary world knows the commercial value of a *succès de scandale* and may well have exploited the mixture of incomprehension, indignation and enthusiasm which greeted certain novels of the fifties. But these novels shocked by their *form*, a fact which in itself makes them startlingly new, so new that it was felt that the old mould might no longer contain them, hence the suggestion that the novel as an art form is moribund. Before taking up this last point, the original query - "What precisely is meant by the term 'new novel'?" must be dealt with.

The following statement by Butor provides the most reasonable answer:

> "Historiquement l'expression "nouveau roman" a déjà un sens assez clair: il s'agit d'un certain nombre de romanciers qui sont devenus brusquement plus connus vers 1956. Ces romanciers, fort divers, avaient évidemment des points communs, et ce n'est pas un hasard s'ils ont été publiés alors en grande partie par la même maison d'édition. ...
>
> Mais un tel rapprochement n'a nullement permis la constitution d'une doctrine commune..." (R 2, 300).

The new novel, then, is not a figment of the imagination, or more accurately, of the critics' imaginations. It does exist and it is new, although the writers involved could hardly be said to form a school, in the sense that they hold a fairly strictly defined body of doctrine in common; yet they do share certain broad but crucial concepts in regard to novel-writing. It now remains to decide if the new novel is a novel at all and if it is true that the novel is dead or dying.

In order to answer these questions it becomes necessary to examine what we understand by the term "traditional novel". It is a quite ambiguous one, although it has been invoked freely as representing the opposite pole to the new novel. It is often taken to mean the great novels of the past - the "classics" of the genre - but it really refers to the popular conception of those works and of novels generally. And it becomes increasingly clear, in the light of the debates which the new novel has generated, that the great novels of the nineteenth century are often poorly understood by the majority of their readers. As Butor has pointed out, we are now forced to look back on these works with a different eye and the fact that the new novel has this effect is, according to him, but another mark of its profound newness. "L'oeuvre actuelle nous apprend la fécondité méconnue du passé ... La marque même d'une profonde nouveauté, c'est son pouvoir rétroactif." (R 3, 13). This retroactive power operates in two ways. Either the new work constitutes a return to earlier work which has been neglected, proscribed or ill-understood (the outstanding example would be the Renaissance) or it is such a departure from tradition as to be regarded as a threat, provoking a re-examination of its ancestors, the originals which were talked of but not read, obscured by their too numerous imitations. The present discussion is an appropriate example of the latter development.

As a genre, the novel is more open than most to a superficial reading, since it lends itself easily to what Nathalie Sarraute has called "les satisfactions extra-littéraires". Sarraute claims that readers frequently demand from the novel:

> "...un secours dans leur solitude, une description de leur situation, des révélations sur les côtés secrets de la vie des autres, des conseils pleins de sagesse, des solutions justes aux conflits dont ils souffrent, un élargissement de leur expérience, l'impression de vivre d'autres vies."[9]

(Maupassant, incidentally, has a remarkably similar list in his preface to *Pierre et Jean*.[10]) These extra-literary satisfactions are what Sartre had in mind when he condemned the bourgeoisie for regarding literature as consumer goods and even Erich Auerbach, who is more charitably disposed, points out the escapism which the bourgeois reader of the last century sought to gratify by reading. The fact that the novel could, until quite recently, and may even yet, in many cases, be read for the story-line alone, made it the ideal vehicle for escapism - a sort of opium of the bourgeoisie, as Auerbach has somewhat suprisingly implied.[11] It has become fashionable to disapprove of the reader who wants to know what becomes of the hero and who would have read *La Comédie Humaine* in order to follow the adventures of Rastignac or Rubempré. Perhaps some of this arises from literary snobbery but Sarraute's objections are made on more serious grounds.

It is her opinion that if novels are read with a view to providing extra-literary satisfactions, there is a danger that the false coin passed by third-rate practitioners may appear, to the undiscriminating reader, to have the same value as the true gold of the great novelists. If classics and pulp are devoured indiscriminately for the same purpose (which has nothing to do with literature) may not one category be as good or as bad as the other? At first glance they may appear to be interchangeable, but even on the plane of extra-literary satisfactions the great novel will triumph over the formula. Great books save the careless reader in spite of himself by refusing to be *consumed*. Unlike their shadows, "ils supportent d'être relus",[12] thus proclaiming the kernel of reality which lies at their center, underneath whatever outmoded intrigue. Their authors have sincerely sought, by all the means at their command to express each his individual "parcelle de réalité"[13] and intuitively, we realise that it is here, and not in the cardboard travesty provided by the "foule ... distinguée qui singe un certain nombre des caractéristiques les plus extérieures des grands romans"[14] that our goal also lies.

This reality goes far beyond the plot and character which Alberto Moravia has described as the "civil register kind", such as one finds in the detective novel, where "Plot and character are defined and set in motion by mechanically calculated interests and passions, rigidly consistent in themselves though starting out from a quite unreal convention, as in a parlour game."[15] (Interestingly, Butor too has equated the satisfactions we obtain from second rate novels with those provided by the detective novel or the pornographic one.) Unfortunately, our reading time is limited and we may waste a great deal of it on dross. That is Butor's great objection to "la formule du roman habituel". Second rate novels are pernicious because they obscure the great works whose most superficial aspects they imitate. As Moravia has pointed out, plot was never an end in itself for the great novelists, but the "sum total of ideological themes as they conflict and merge." The characters, though autonomous and human were *ideas* too and many novels compete, not with the civil register but with the philosophical treatise or the moral essay. Purveyors of "la formule du roman habituel", by inviting us to conform to a convention which in their case is bankrupt (being underwritten by no individual "parcelle de réalité", by no personal ideology), blind us to the changes which have taken place in ourselves and in the world in which we live, and atrophy us so that we are incapable of moving towards change.

Yet if the "parcelle de réalité" as Sarraute understands it is a counter-force to escapism, still the escapism offered by the novel has always been intimately linked with verisimilitude. Indeed, to a large extent, the power of the novel to offer escape may be measured by its success in impressing on the reader that "all is true". Hence the popular conception of the novel will usually be found to hinge on confused notions of the "realism" which is held to be the sine qua non of the genre, and one of the primary sources of the reader's satisfaction. But this realism, though a distinguishing mark of the genre, is yet only one of its facets, as Butor has indicated:

> "Cette application du roman à la réalité est d'une extrême complexité et son 'réalisme', le fait qu'il se présente comme fragment illusoire du quotidien, n'en est qu'un aspect particulier, celui qui nous permet de l'isoler comme genre littéraire." (R 1, 10).

The word *illusoire* is important, for the novelist is an illusionist and the most convincingly told story is, in the end, all done with mirrors. "J'en conclus que les

Réalistes de talent devraient s'appeler plutôt des Illusionistes" wrote Maupassant in 1887 and his next sentence (much admired by Henry James) explodes the commonly held belief that for writers of the nineteenth century reality was a body of truth external to themselves and waiting to be "imitated". "Quel enfantillage d'ailleurs, de croire à la réalité puisque nous portons chacun la nôtre dans nôtre pensée et dans nos organes."[16] Furthermore, one ought to consider, in what possible sense one may speak of *reality* in relation to the novel, itself a figment of the imagination.[17] The terms reality and realism are ambiguous, but it can be deduced from Butor's remark that what he has called "Cette application du roman à la réalité" is a whole of which "rèalisme" in the commonly accepted though illusory sense of *vérisme* is but a part. That he makes a distinction between Realism and "réalisme" is evident from a statement he has made elsewhere.[18]

Discussing how the term Realism might be applied to the new novel, he said that it could be used in two ways. First, in the sense that the new novel presents to us a recognisable image of the contemporary world, which is at the same time sufficiently unusual to bring us up short before matters we had hitherto ignored. This realism is in no way limiting, since it includes dreams and illusions, which form a part of reality as we know it and so must be described. On the other hand one may speak of Realism in a moral sense in connection with the new novel, in so far as the latter dispels illusions, allowing things to be seen and shown as they really are. The error underlying the popular conception of the novel is the reduction of Realism to "réalisme" in the sense Butor attributes to these terms. The error of the producers of "la formule du roman habituel" has been to mistake the shadow of "réalisme" for the substance of the "application du roman à la réalité." The result, as Butor claims, is incoherence. "Le style et les anecdotes ne 'collent' pas; la reférence à la réalité ne correspond pas à la forme du livre."[19]

The problem posed by "cette application du roman à la réalité" is not a new one. It subtends every novel although not every novel embodies a satisfactory solution. It has always preoccupied novelists and their meditations on the matter were often published, but separately from the novels themselves. To be sure prefaces formed part of the same physical volume as the novels that followed them, but the opinions they expressed did not normally erupt in the text of the novel itself. It is interesting that with the development of the genre, prefaces tended to increase in number, length and importance, only to disappear again, and surely one of the causes of their disappearance was that the reflections which they had contained began to make their appearance within the fabric of the novel itself. Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*[20] is a case in point, a book which must be regarded as an important milestone in the development of the modern French novel, not only because of its form but because it contains within it critical reflections on that form and because these reflections anticipate much that the new novelists were later to express.

> "'Ne craignez-vous pas, en quittant la réalité, de vous égarer dans des régions mortellement abstraites, et de faire un roman, non d'êtres vivants, mais d'idées?' demanda Sophroniska craintivement."
>
> Gide, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*

Using the novelist-hero Edouard as his mouthpiece Gide claims that it is out of timidity (being free of such canonical laws as dominate tragedy for example) that the novel "s'est cramponné à la réalité" and that it will never establish itself as a great art form except by that "volontaire écartement de la vie"[21] (already present in the tragedy) which the development of style implies, and which, while disassociating itself from the appearance of reality, reveals the more clearly what Jacques Maritain has called "the transapparent reality"[22] which is the true object of creative intuition. As G. W. Ireland has demonstrated,[23] Gide does not believe (any more than did Maupassant) in the existence of an objective reality whose perception is common to all observers and which exists independently of them. It is one of the achievements of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* that it is the reader alone who may re-establish the reality of events which for each character are "légèrement déformés"[24] since it is he alone who enjoys a variety of perspectives. The omniscient narrator is replaced by the omniscient reader.

The entire chapter called "Edouard expose ses idées sur le roman" is of capital importance to the student of the novel in France; however the discussion here will be confined to Edouard's theories on the relationship between the novel and reality. He rejects outright the suggestion that the novel should compete with the civil register, crying, "L'état c'est moi, l'artiste!" (*Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, 231). He criticises the "tranche de vie" of the naturalists on the grounds that they were unable or unwilling to cut it in any direction but lengthwise, in time. He himself wishes to make his novel all-embracing - "je voudrais tout y faire entrer, dans ce roman." (P. 232), and the effort to stylise this wealth of material will be the matter of his book. "Ce que je veux, c'est de présenter d'une part la réalité, présenter d'autre part cet effort pour la styliser ... "(P. 232). (One is strongly reminded here of at least two of Butor's novels, *L'Emploi du temps* and *Degrés*.) The means by which Edouard proposes to do this - presenting in his novel a novelist at grips with reality - has also been employed by Alberto Moravia, whose ideas on the novel generally are very close to Gide's.

Moravia declares that when people speak of a crisis in the novel, they really mean a crisis in the nineteenth century novel, and he claims that it was the attempt of the nineteenth century novel to "faire concurrence à l'état civil" that was its undoing. He has pointed out, as Gide foretold, that the very efficiency of the civil register, photography and journalism has contributed to making that type of novel pointless and boring. Like Edouard, he believes that the novel can only develop by means of a flight from naturalism. The "objective" representation of reality must be left to the cinema, or at least the pseudo-objective representation, which from the point of view of the consumer comes to the same thing; and what Moravia calls the essay-type novel must prevail, with the concomitant effect of appealing to a very restricted readership. This essay-type novel, as he describes it, comprehends both a vitalistic urge to give us all "reality" and the essayist's attempt to order that reality according to the plans of an ideology. Surely this describes Edouard's projected book exactly? By ideology, of course, Moravia understands not a superimposed credo, but rather the writer's consciousness of the themes that underly his own work. This type of novel, he claims, can only arise at a determined moment in the development of the genre, that is when "the poetic design in naturalistic representation has degenerated into a mechanism".[25] For the novel is poetic, and the novelist's thought springs not from his mind (like the philosopher's) but from his sensibility. Every discovery made by the sensibility brings with it a discovery in theme, though the novelist may be unaware of it. For example, the critical perspective now available to us allows us to discern the themes underlying Balzac's work, but was he himself aware of them? An author's awareness of his themes and their articulation into an ideology are characteristic of the essay-type novel as defined by Moravia. Thus *Ulysses*, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, the novels of Butor, are all essay-type novels. If *La Comédie Humaine* is not, this detracts in no way from it's stature as a great novel. Firstly, in it the "poetic design in naturalistic representation" is very much alive. Furthermore it would be an error to mistake its "réalisme" for its "application à la réalité", which is highly complex, as Butor has demonstrated.[26]

In order to appreciate the scope of Balzac's endeavour, it is essential to consider *La Comédie Humaine* as a whole. This was crucial to Balzac himself, who felt this aspect of his work to be his inspired improvement on the accomplishment of Sir Walter Scott. From this point of view, Butor argues, we are able to appreciate the complex interplay which makes of *La Comédie Humaine* "un mobile romanesque", even "un prodigieux exemple sur le plan romanesque", of *Le Livre* which haunted Mallarmé. (R 1, 84). What may at first appear, in one of its parts to be a linear intrigue, emerges, after the reading of related novels as the culmination of a number of themes severally developed elsewhere. Butor has described how, by means of his use of celebrated contemporaries whom he mentions by name, and by his happy invention of recurring characters, Balzac succeeded in making of his novel a *contraction* of reality: " ... la relation de ce qu'on dit d'un personnage fictif dans un roman avec ce qu'on en dit dans les autres, étant exactement la même que celle de ce qui est dit d'un personnage réel dans *La Comédie Humaine* avec ce qu'on en dit ailleurs." (R 1, 87).

The moral purport of realism is apparent too in *La Comédie Humaine* since by the end of his labours Balzac has become more and more disillusioned with the "deux vérités éternelles, la réligion et la monarchie" which had at first lighted his path. Balzac's avowed ambition was to "forcer l'arcane de la nature".[27] The *réalisme* he employed in pursuit of this aim, the third person narrative which took objective representation and belief in the object for granted, was valid for him. But the reality of today has very little in common with the reality which presented itself to Balzac and the novelist of today who seeks to "forcer le réel à se révéler" (R 1, 272) must invent forms adequate to the task.

To the question "Is the new novel really a novel at all?", the answer then must be an emphatic "yes". For the real opposition lies not between the new novel and the traditional novel, but between the new novel and the popular conception of the traditional novel, a misguided conception which finds its justification in the works of what Ezra Pound has called the "diluters" and André Gide the *faux-monnayeurs* - the producers of "la formule du roman habituel".

This formula may well be dead or dying, and if so it would be no great loss. Butor, at least, feels it would be a positive benefit, since books of this kind merely mask the great originals. But the novel as a genre is perhaps only in crisis in so far as the techniques of fiction have always been in crisis, that is in evolution. Viewed in this light, the new novel simply represents a particular moment, in France, in the development of the Western novel. Nonetheless, Butor's own career, extending from the first four novels to what critics have called Romanesque II seems to show a gradual abandonment of the novel form. The long-promised novel *Les Jumeaux* has apparently been set aside in favour of essays, poetry and works such as *Mobile* and *Description de San Marco*. He has said that facts are now so readily and so abundantly available as to make fictions unnecessary, and furthermore, that information need no longer be communicated through books. Television, the cinema and the tape recorder all provide alternatives to reading and this is not necessarily a bad thing, as Ezra Pound noted, as early as 1934: "Max Ernst's designs send a great deal of psychological novel writing into the discard. The cinema supersedes a great deal of second-rate narrative, and a great deal of theatre. ... In all cases one test will be, 'could this material have been more efficient in another medium?'"[28]

Yet, though Butor has admitted that the novel no longer holds for him "la primauté absolue" which it hitherto held, he everywhere affirms the value and importance of the *book*, emphasising, among other things its great flexibility as an object compared with the tape recording, for example, which can neither be riffled through successfully, nor read in reverse order. Butor's reverence for *Le Livre*, recalling Mallarmé's in its intensity, persists. He has described how, in the earlier stages of his career, the novel provided him with a satisfactory compromise between the essay and the poem (Moravia's essay-type novel comes to mind here). There are indications that the later works are attempts to absorb all three forms in the book, without this time allowing the novel form to dominate. On the other hand, he may be suffering from the malaise which Mary McCarthy has described thus:

> "We are all in flight from the novel and yet drawn back to it, as to some unfinished and problematic relationship. The novel seems to be dissolving into its component parts: the essay, the travel book, reporting, on the one hand, and the 'pure' fiction of the tale on the other. The center will not hold. No

> structure (except Faulkner's) has been strong enough to keep in suspension the diverse elements of which the novel is made. You can call this, if you want, a failure of the imagination. We know that the real world exists, but we can no longer imagine it.[29]

In any event, it is significant that Butor's first recourse as a mature writer, was to the novel, a fact which is no doubt strongly related to his bourgeois background and upbringing, the influence of which he has frequently asserted.

"Tous les écrivains d'origine bourgeoise ont connu la tentation de l'irresponsabilité."

Sartre, *Situations II*

"Il me paraît normal d'être un écrivain bourgeois parlant sur des bourgeois."

Butor à Madeleine Chapsal

The most violent reaction to the new novel has come from the habitual novel-readers. It is no accident that these readers are largely drawn from the ranks of the bourgeoisie. That this should be so, was to a great extent historically determined by the flowering of the novel in the nineteenth century. It is useful to recall here Sartre's treatment of the relations between the Bourgeoisie and literature in the essay "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?"[30] The importance of Sartre's contribution to the theory and development of the modern novel in France seems to have been underestimated. This may be due to the alleged abandonment of *engagement* by the young novelists and in equal measure to Sartre's own socio-political stance, which has sometimes tended to obscure his often penetrating critical judgments.

It is his contention that the choice of public determines to a large extent an author's choice and treatment of his subject. (Conversely, a work will find its public by reason of its subject and presentation.) The cause of this lies in the elliptical nature of language. People who share the same background and experience can communicate satisfactorily with the minimum of words. This principle applies to the writer and reader, who share a common fund of experience, and their point of contact is established by what Sartre calls "le truchement du livre." "Ecriture et lecture sont les deux faces d'un même fait d'histoire", (P. 119) he continues, and in the course of a book, the writer calls on a whole world of institutions, passions and conventions which he and his reader hold in common, in order that the reader may consciously *assume* his world and thus achieve his own liberation. At least, this is the aim of the writer of good faith, who, free himself, launches an appeal to the freedom of his reader.

According to Sartre, the position of the nineteenth century writer was essentially one of bad faith, because while affecting to despise the Bourgeoisie, he remained part of it. Works which were designed to provoke a scandal were assimilated by the bourgeois reading public, with its insatiable utilitarianism, and this was connived at by writers whose schoolboyish pleasure it was to "épater le bourgeois". Even writing the avowed purpose of which was to be purposeless (L'art pour l'art) was absorbed anyway, as a *divertissement*. The complicity between the artist and public in the nineteenth century was founded on the fact that the writer both knew and did not wish to know the public for whom he was writing. Instead of assuming his public, the writer emphasised his solitude and claimed that he was writing only for himself or for God. But however carefully he blinkered himself from his readers he could not escape their insidious influence and it was by his technique that he betrayed himself, Sartre claims:

> "Mais sa technique le trahit, parce qu'il ne la surveille pas avec le même zèle, elle exprime un choix plus profond et plus vrai, une obscure métaphysique, une relation authentique avec la société contemporaine." (P. 177).

That is to say that in portraying an ordered and hierarchical world where he himself acted as God and where the dominating motive was self-interest, the novelist betrayed his unconscious acceptance of the bourgeois world-view. Robbe-Grillet has described the situation in terms that echo Sartre almost word for word:

> "Tous les éléments techniques du récit ... tout visait à imposer l'image d'un univers stable, cohérent, continu, univoque, entièrement déchiffrable. Comme l'intelligibilité du monde n'était même pas mise en question, reconter ne posait pas de problème."[31]

Instead of rendering the strangeness and opacity of the world, it was expected of the nineteenth century writer that he would make it more easily digestible by reducing it to a series of elementary and subjective impressions. Thus, says Sartre, in spite of all disclaimers and however cynical and embittered the subject matter of the novels might have been, " ... la technique romanesque du XIX^{e} siecle offre au public français une image rassurante de la bourgeoisie." (P. 177).

Sartre, then, goes further than Sarraute in his condemnation of the nineteenth century novel, since he denies its validity even for nineteenth century readers, although he does grudgingly admit that the writers of the time did the best they could, even producing some of the masterpieces of French literature in the process. This suggests that Sartre applies, or applied, a double standard to literature; on the one hand political, on the other, aesthetic. The issue of *engagement* which dominates "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" and the apparent rejection of this credo by the new novelists has provided critics with useful material for the construction of a watershed between the post-war existentialist novel and the new novel.

At first glance, it would seem that the new novelists reject political and social commitment out of hand. Robbe-Grillet has done so categorically. But a great deal depends here on the meaning given the word *engagement* both by Sartre and by others. When he was writing "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" in the aftermath of the war, it seems almost certain that "*engagement*" for him at that time, meant political commitment to the left and implied (if not outright propaganda) at least didactic writing. In 1960, however, we find him saying to Madeleine Chapsal:

> "Si la littérature n'est pas *tout* elle ne vaut pas une heure de peine. C'est cela que je veux dire par "engagement" ... Si chaque phrase écrite ne résonne pas à tous les niveaux de l'homme et de la société, elle ne signifie rien." (Chapsal, 211).

In the course of the same interview he cites Mallarmé as an example of "L'artiste engagé". To this interpretation of "*engagement*" it is evident that Butor subscribes fully, just as he is aware that the term is commonly misunderstood. Thus he condemns "cette démission devant son métier propre qui se cache le plus souvent si mal sous le beau mot d'engagement".[32] In an interview given to an Italian periodical,[33] Butor declares that the motives which impel him as an individual to take a firm leftist political stance, demand that as a writer, he limit himself to internal research directed at his personal lived experience. He believes that works of art operate on the age which produces them. They cannot be gratuitous. The problem is to discover the direction in which their efficacy tends, and good intentions are not enough to insure that the work does not belie the tendencies which are at its roots. There must be critical awareness on the part of the writer. He must realise fully the direction in which his work tends. Writing has to be a very conscious affair.

This is a long way from the explicit leftist attitude which *engagement* is often taken to mean. Seen in this light it is not a super-imposed value, but simply the writer's commitment to being a writer, always remembering Rimbaud's challenge: "Il faut changer la vie". Thus, in a sense, among Butor's most committed acts as a writer might be the publication of the *Répertoire* series, the raison d'être of which he described to Madeleine Chapsal as follows:

> "Le problème est de savoir ce que c'est que la littérature. Pourquoi les gens écrivent? A quoi sert d'écrire? Et en particulier des romans."

To these questions, which reproduce almost exactly the chapter headings in "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?", Butor provides his own answer:

> " ... on écrit pour changer son existence. Et on ne peut changer son existence qu'en essayant de changer celle des autres."[34]

Butor, however, seems to be more reconciled to his own bourgeois background than Sartre to his, and in consequence, he can accept a bourgeois readership with greater equanimity. It seems that a certain amount of education, money and leisure have usually been and continue to be necessary to the enjoyment of literature, and to that extent books are written for an élite - a fact which Sartre too, now acknowledges. Although there may be some grounds for disapproval of nineteenth century writing (and they would have to be of a social and political rather than a literary nature), yet it was expressive of the society in which it flourished, as Sartre himself has indicated. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that:

> "The frequent emphasis on the contrast between 'artist' and 'bourgeois' must not lead to the conclusion that nineteenth century literature had any other soil to grow in than that of the bourgeoisie."[35]

To retain the conventions of the nineteenth century novel in today's society is, however, another matter, and represents a more pernicious form of dishonesty than that with which Sartre taxed the writers of the last century, because, in Robbe-Grillet's words:

> "...la répétition systématique des formes du passé ... en nous fermant les yeux sur notre situation réelle dans le monde présent ... nous empêche, en fin de compte de construire le monde et l'homme de demain."[36]

The novel which is "semplicione e oziosa",[37] "la formule du roman habituel", inculcates laziness in its readers too and is inadequate to reflect the age we live in. That is why the new novelists reject it and why, before them, Flaubert, Proust, Joyce, Faulkner and Kafka were all engaged in cracking the old moulds.

As far back as the forties, Sartre saw clearly many of the issues which the new novelists have since confronted. His essays on Mauriac and Faulkner,[38] for example, are a double-pronged attack on what he regarded as the besetting evils of the novel as it then stood - narration in the third person and in the past tense and adherence to linear progression in time. These techniques, which are essentially explicative, Sartre sees as betraying the nineteenth century writer's complicity with the bourgeoisie, since they are indicative of its world-view. They express an ordered society where everything has an explanation and where the cult of the man of experience (who has seen everything) finds an echo in the omniscient narrator. This is in keeping with his belief that the choice of public determines the subject and treatment of the work, and vice versa. At the time of writing "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" the ideal of a literature for the masses seems to have obsessed Sartre. Butor does not share this ideal and indeed treats it with some severity: " ... bien souvent, celui qui prétend écrire 'pour le peuple', l'enfermant dans sa différence, son manque de loisir et de culture, travaille en fait contre lui." (R 1, 129) He accepts (as Sartre himself had done by 1960), that his potential readership will be confined largely to the bourgeoisie, yet he insists that the public of a book may *not* be known in advance. It does not exist until the book itself calls it into being. A cleavage in the potential readership occurs, which determines who the real public will be, rather as the real audience of a lecturer is called into being among those present, by their response to his words, a response of which they may not have known themselves capable beforehand. Only original writing provokes this rift and sometimes it can only be achieved by "s'écartant délibérément, expressément de telle direction pourrissante." (R 1, 132). This is what has occurred with the new novel.

The cleavage of which Butor speaks has been accomplished in the most obvious way, by formal means. The new novelists, and Butor outstandingly, are preoccupied with formal experiment. Seizing on this, some critics have dismissed their work as cold and superficial, or have accused them of a puerile desire to "épater le bourgeois". This is to perpetuate the distinction between *forme* and *fond*, which the new novelists reject, and which Sartre rejected when he declared in his essay on Faulkner that: "une technique romanesque renvoie toujours à la métaphysique du romancier".[39] If technique is not gratuitous ornament, and if *métaphysique* may be interpreted as the development of a *weltanschauung*, and if the culmination of metaphysical effort be "a synthetic statement, in ultimate terms, of the nature of the real, as far as it is attainable from the human standpoint",[40] then

Sartre's comment is an apt rubric under which to embark on a study of Butor. The discussion will not, however, be limited to "technique *romanesque*", hence to a consideration of Butor as a novelist exclusively. He is a *writer* and Sartre's dictum may justifiably be applied to literary expressions other than the novel.

In his essay on Faulkner, Sartre goes on to say that: "la tâche du critique est de dégager celle-ci [la métaphysique] avant d'apprécier celle-là [la technique]."[41] I accept these critical obligations, but not necessarily their sequence. The two activities must be carried on simultaneously (as far as possible) rather than consecutively, since technique and *métaphysique* must be continually and mutually revelatory.

The task will be made both easier and more difficult by the existence of Butor's own criticism, in which many of his literary theories are exposed. Easier, in that some of his thoughts on writing are available to us, more difficult in that the extent of his theorising argues a supremely conscious writer who exerts a high degree of control over his work and a subtle intelligence whose operations it would be mistaken to oversimplify.

[1] See Alain Robbe-Grillet, "A quoi servent les théories," *Pour un nouveau roman*, Collection Idees (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 7-17.

In July 1971, at Cérisy-La-Salle, the colloquium called *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui* gave birth to the term "*nouveau*" *nouveau roman*, which was applied to the works of such writers as Jean Ricardou and Claude Ollier. This phenomenon evidently takes the *nouveau roman* as its point of departure, a fact which its alleged exponents tacitly acknowledged, when they accepted the term, and is a further indication that the *nouveau roman* is a particular art form which may be isolated and identified and that it marks a water-shed in the development of the modern French novel.

The proceedings of the colloquium have been published in two volumes:

> *Nauveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui*, 1, *Problèmes généraux*, 2, *Pratiques*, Collection 10 18 (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1972).

[2] See Nathalie Sarraute, "Ce que voient les oiseaux," *L'Ere du soupçon: Essais sur le roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 125-155. Also Michel Butor, "Le roman comme recherche," *Répertoire I*, Collection "Critique" (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1968).

[3] Sarraute, "L'Ere du soupçon," op. cit., p. 63.

[4] Sarraute, pp. 144-145.

[5] Robbe-Grillet, "Sur quelques notions périmées," op. cit., pp. 52-53.

[6] Robbe-Grillet, "Une voie pour le roman futur," op. cit. p. 20.

[7] Pierre Daix, "Avec Michel Butor," *Les Lettres Françaises*, No. 1037 (Juillet 1974), pp. 6-7.

[8] Léon S. Roudiez, "The Embattled Myths," *Hereditas: Seven Essays on the Modern Experience of the Classical*, Ed. Frederick Will (Austin, Texas: University of Austin Press, 1964), p. 79.

[9] Sarraute, pp. 134-135.

[10] Guy de Maupassant, "Etude sur le roman.", Préface à *Pierre et Jean* (1887) *Anthologie des préfaces de romans français du XIX*^{e} *siecle*, Présentation de Herbert S. Gershman et Kernan B. Whitworth Junior, Collection Littérature, No. 21 (Paris: Julliard, 1964), p. 307:

> "En somme, le public est composé de groupes nombreux qui nous crient:
> - Consolez-moi.
> - Amusez-moi.
> - Attristez-moi.
> - Attendrissez-moi.
> - Faites-moi rêver.
> - Faites-moi rire.
> - Faites-moi frémir.
> - Faites-moi pleurer.
> - Faites-moi penser.
>
> Seuls, quelques esprits d'élite demandent à l'artiste:
> - Faites-moi quelque chose de beau, dans la forme qui vous conviendra le mieux, suivant votre tempérament."

[11] Erich Auerbach, "Germinie Lacerteux," *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 501-502.

[12] Sarraute, p. 139.

[13] Sarraute, p. 141.

[14] Madeleine Chapsal, *Les Ecrivains en personne* (Paris: Julliard, 1960), p. 63.

[15] Alberto Moravia, "Notes on the Novel," *Man as an End*, Trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. 175.

[16] Maupassant, op. cit., p. 312.

[17] See Edoardo Sanguineti, "Il trattamento del materiale verbale nei testi della nuova avanguardia," *Lettere italiane* (Ottobre-Dicembre 1964) pp. 455-475.

[18] "Butor in Bulgaria: Dichariazioni sul 'nouveau roman' alla rivista 'Plamak'," *L'Europa Letteraria*, No. 28, (Aprile 1964) pp. 129-131.

[19] Chapsal, p. 63.

[20] André Gide, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925; rpt. Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1960).

[21] Gide, p. 230.

[22] Jacques Maritain, "Beauty and Modern Painting," *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry: The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts*, Meridian Books (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1954), p. 165.

[23] G. W. Ireland, "Les Faux-Monnayeurs," *André Gide: A Study of his Creative Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 345.

[24] André Gide, *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), p. 18.

[25] Moravia, pp. 169-170.

[26] Butor, "Balzac et la réalité," *Répertoire I*, pp. 79-93.

[27] Honoré de Balzac, *La Comédie Humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935-59), Vol. IX, p. 394.

[28] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, New Directions Paperbook No. 89 (1934; rpt. New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1960), p. 76.

[29] Mary McCarthy, "The Fact in Fiction," *On the Contrary* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962), p. 270.

[30] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" *Situations II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 55-317.

[31] Robbe-Grillet, op. cit., p. 37.

[32] Butor, "Une autobiographie dialectique," in Répertoire I, p. 262.

[33] Paulo Caruso, "Intervista a Michel Butor," *Aut Aut*, No. 68, Marzo 1962, pp. 165-171.

[34] Chapsal, p. 68.

[35] Auerbach, op. cit., p. 504. Butor says substantially the same thing to Madeleine Chapsal about the situation today, op. cit., p. 61.

[36] Robbe-Grillet, p. 10.

[37] "Butor in Bulgaria," p. 130.

[38] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), "M. François Mauriac et la liberté," pp. 36-57. "À propos de *Le bruit et la fureur*, la temporalité chez Faulkner," pp. 70-80.

[39] *Situations I*, p. 71

In reply to the question: "Pourriez-vous parler de votre inspiration, de votre 'métaphysique', si vous acceptez ce mot dans son sens le plus large?", Jean Gaugeard, "Michel Butor, Répertoire II", *Les Lettres Françaises*, No. 1022, 26 March 1964, Butor said:

> "Je ne peux pas parler de *ma* métaphysique, ou de *ma* philosophie. Si elle n'est que la mienne, elle est sans interêt. Le mot *métaphysique* me semble ambigu, dangereux. Il faudrait définir le sens exact du préfixe *méta*. Mes romans ont

> une signification *physique*. Ma technique est physique. Il est évident que le rapport est tellement étroit que l'on ne peut dissocier les deux termes. Le langage transforme la situation de l'homme dans l'univers. Toute invention technique dans le domaine du langage est *métaphysique*."

This statement conveys an opinion regarding the indissoluble link between technique and *métaphysique* which is substantially in agreement with Sartre's.

[40] See A. S. Pringle-Pattison, "Metaphysics," in James M. Baldwin, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (New York: Macmillan, 1925) pp. 72-74.

[41] *Situations I*, p. 71.

The Uses of Criticism

"A quoi bon? - Vaste et terrible point d'interrogation qui saisit la critique au collet, dès le premier pas qu'elle veut faire dans son premier chapitre."

Baudelaire

The distinction between creative and critical writing has been the subject of long and frequent discussion and in spite of the many new developments in criticism that have occurred in recent years, the notion persists that the creative writer has chosen the better part.

It is possible of course to distinguish between creative writing and criticism at a purely utilitarian level, where no value judgment is involved. The title of a French book, for example, will frequently be followed by the category of writing to which it belongs, as in *La Modification, roman*, thus giving the reader a general idea of what he ought to expect, so that he may dispose his mind accordingly. The implications of this convention have not been lost on Butor, as a glance at the title pages of his books will reveal.

The same effect is more forcibly obtained by the adoption of a distinctive format for a critical series, as in Gallimard's *Les Essais* or the *Collection Critique* of Les Editions de Minuit. Such classification is useful; it is doubtful if library catalogues could function without it; but it is Butor's belief that a book labelled *roman* may, indeed ought to be, critical, in the same degree that its fellow, dubbed *essai*, ought to be inventive. "Toute invention est une critique" he claims, as "Toute critique est invention." The essay "La Critique et l'invention"[1], which is based on these two premises, is one of Butor's most explicit statements of the uses of criticism and as such it is important, not only from the point of view of his aesthetics, but as a guide-line on how to proceed with a critical study of his own work.

Dealing first with the claim that "Toute invention est une critique", Butor points out that since the novel is now an established literary genre, no contemporary novelist can claim to be inventing a new form. He is necessarily writing in an atmosphere already saturated with the *romanesque*. If he is an original writer, then the inventive element in his work is its implied criticism of the writing of his predecessors. His attitude is critical in the sense that he has been conscious of their inadequacy in certain areas; his consequent desire to "combler le vide" must result in invention: that is, in creative writing. Ezra Pound expressed much the same view in his notice on *Ulysses*, when he observed that:

> "The best criticism of any work, to my mind the only criticism of any work of art that is of any permanent or even moderately durable value, comes from the creative writer or artist who does the next job; and *not*, not ever from the young gentlemen who make generalities about the creator. Laforgue's Salomé is the real criticism of Salammbô; Joyce and perhaps Henry James are critics of Flaubert."[2]

Such criticism is, however, implicit and remains so until it is brought into the domaine of critical writing properly so called. At the same time, "Toute critique d'une littérature antérieure ... en s'approfondissant" will eventually emerge not only as a criticism of an anterior literature, but of "une réalité antérieure" as well, according to Butor (R 3, 11), and what is more, since for him all creative writing implies a criticism of the status quo - of reality, of society and its institutions - the anterior literature too will be made to yield up the latent criticism it contained.

It is Butor's distinction that his writing has been both implicitly and explicitly critical, in the particular sense which he accords to the term and it may be because he is equally eminent as creative writer and critic (in the commonly accepted meaning of these terms) that he feels none of the malaise to which many critics are prey. When he asserts that "Toute critique est invention" he cannot be suspected of special pleading.

Having made it clear that by *La Critique* he does not understand the writing of reviews, an activity which "à la limite est le corrélatif exact d'une littérature 'commerciale'."[3] Butor states his belief in the high destiny of criticism in moving terms:

> "De même que le véritable écrivain est celui qui ne peut supporter que l'on parle si peu ou si mal de tel ou tel aspect de la réalité, qui se sent dans l'obligation d'attirer l'attention sur celui-ci définitivement, il l'espère ... de même le critique le plus utile est celui qui ne peut supporter que l'on parle si peu ou si mal de tel livre, de tel tableau, de telle musique, et l'obligation est aussi durement ressentie dans ce domaine que dans tout autre." (R 2, 133-134).

The creative writer turns his gaze on reality, and implicitly on other artists' rendering of it; the critic completes the project, making his contribution to that "oeuvre plus claire plus riche, plus intéressante", which is a compound of the original text and what has been written about it.

Since, according to Butor, the artist can never feel that his work is finished, but that rather he abandons it when he can do no more with it, short of creating a new work altogether, the most effective critic will be he who is capable of *prolonging* the artist's invention by his own, by fusing his imagination with the artist's. As Henry James expressed it: "To criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one's own."[4] For Butor, this concept of criticism carries with it the obligation, for the critic, to put his readers in touch with the "criticised thing". The public he aims at "n'est donc autre que celui qu'il apporte à l'auteur qui l'a retenu." (R 2, 134). The critic who does not send his reader back to the text (or the painting, or the music) he writes of, has betrayed his trust; nor will his failure to efface himself cause his work to endure, for it is only that criticism "qui permet ainsi d'atteindre l'oeuvre inépuisable, [qui] conserve un inépuisable pouvoir de mise en rapport, [qui] est oeuvre soi-même,". (R 2, 134).

This means that criticism must be positive, at least in the sense that it is "ouverte". It must never condemn in the name of a pre-conceived formula for this would be incompatible with any power of "mise en rapport". Indeed one concludes that condemnation has little place in Butorian criticism for it is the critic's function not to restrict, but to accelerate the growth of the "postérité en expansion" for which the artist has aimed. It follows, then, that the "véritable critique" can only be concerned with the "véritable écrivain", and that he shares in his imaginative power and his high moral purpose.

But if the critic is the peer of the creative writer on aesthetic and moral grounds, why is he not himself a creative writer, *tout court*? Butor would say that he *is*, and yet we are aware that there is a sense in which he is not. Suppose we insist on making a distinction between A who writes novels or poetry and B who writes about the work A has done? Butor would argue that the difference between them is one of *degree* rather than quality. Both

A and B stand on other men's shoulders; the artist no less than the critic since Butor holds firmly to the belief that art is a continuum. Furthermore, both criticism and creative writing have a common source in a certain critical awareness, and in their function they are utterly complementary. For if it is true that the critic cannot survive without the artist's work, it is also true that the artist cannot change the world if his work passes unknown or ill-understood. The difference between a novel or a poem and a critical essay is the difference between the implicit and the explicit. And yet, if we accept Butor's view that "L'activité critique consiste à considérer les oeuvres comme inachevées, l'activité poétique, 'l'inspiration' manifeste la réalité même comme inachevée." (R 3, 20), it is hard not to feel that poetry is the bolder venture.

There is a school of thought in France which pushes this argument to the extent of outright opposition to the idea that criticism should be inventive, insisting that the critic should adhere religiously to documented fact, approaching the work through the biography of the artist. Butor has some nicely ironic comments to make on these "essayistes se qualifiant eux-mêmes de 'vieux'," (R 3, 14), his main point being that though they profess to shun "des aventures interpretatives", they may themselves be frequently caught "en flagrant délit de roman." (Ibid.)

The reason is that in presenting documents and in relating the artist's work to his biography, critics of this persuasion are inevitably drawn into interpretation of evidence which, in the nature of things, must be based on speculation. They too are guilty of what they condemn in *la nouvelle critique*: that is, of inventing "à partir des textes". Their invention, however, is often truncated by a lack of imagination, which makes it impossible for them to impute to the artist any motives other than those by which they themselves are inspired. Paradoxically, the more capable of invention the critic is, the closer he can come to what really happened, says Butor. "Imaginer la réalité même" must be the ultimate challenge. Butor does not condemn the biographical approach to literary criticism per se, but the fact that it is not carried far enough. Indeed his own books on Baudelaire and Montaigne clearly indicate that he appreciates the value of biographical data in clarifying the artist's work.

Speaking of *Histoire Extraordinaire*[5], which has as its point of departure a letter of Baudelaire, describing a curious dream which visited him on the eve of publication of his first book (the translation of Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*), Butor says:

> "Dans cette lettre de Baudelaire, j'ai senti qu'il y avait le moyen de relier un nombre d'aspects de la vie et de l'oeuvre de son auteur, de les présenter autrement qu'on ne fait d'habitude, et de parvenir à une cohérence meilleure, les rendant ainsi plus forts et plus beaux. N'est-ce point là le projet de toute critique sérieuse?" (R 2, 295).

Essai sur un rêve de Baudelaire

Histoire Extraordinaire has a strong claim to being the chef d'oeuvre of Butor's critical work, although the essays on Proust, on the theatre of Victor Hugo, on Joyce, and the major essays on the novel as a genre offer a forceful challenge. The solid yet unobtrusive erudition of the study on Baudelaire, its imaginative and intuitive power, the skill and cohesion of its argument have not often been equalled, however, even by Butor himself.[6] Based, as he says, on "certains aspects de la vie et de l'oeuvre" of Baudelaire, the book achieves a remarkable synthesis of the traditional and the "new" critical approaches, revealing how biographical data relating to the poet may illuminate his work, while the work may also reveal the man, or more accurately, the artist, since Butor manages to avoid the pitfall which threatens both the psychoanalytical and the biographical methods, that is to say that their investigations relate more to the man than to the artistic persona, still less in some cases to the work, so that the biographical dimension tends to dominate the critical one, instead of illuminating it, while remaining subordinate.

Taking Baudelaire's dream as its point of departure, Butor's essay submits it, together with certain poems and certain incidents in the poet's life to that "psychanalyse au sens large" to which he has said that his own novels are susceptible. The fact that the dream took place on the eve of such an important event for Baudelaire, and that he took the trouble, immediately on waking, to send a detailed account of it to his friend Asselineau, whom he had probably already half-consciously decided to make his literary executor, indicates that it was no trivial occurrence. Baudelaire obviously felt, however, that his responsibility ended with recording the dream, and placing it in what Butor calls a "Lieu sûr". Butor fulfils the role he himself assigns to the critic by completing the action begun by the poet: by interpreting the dream.

Baudelaire dreamt that he visited a brothel for the purpose of presenting a copy of one of his books, which had just been published, to the Madame. It appears that the book was obscene, hence this curious obligation. Once inside the establishment, however, he discovers to his embarassment that his penis is exposed and that furthermore he is barefoot and that his feet are wet and dirty. In any case he decides that it will suffice to wash them "avant de baiser, et avant de sortir de la maison," since it appears that the presentation of the book is to some extent a pretext to allow him to make love to one of the girls, because, he says: "... sans la nécessité d'offrir le livre, je n'aurais pas osé aller dans une pareille maison." (P. 12). The house consists of a number of intercommunicating "vastes galeries" throughout which the girls are dispersed, chatting with young men whom Baudelaire takes to be "collégiens". He is too shy to speak to any of them, but explores the galleries and examines the curious pictures on the walls. Some of these are of birds, brightly coloured, "dont l'oeil est *vivant*", some are "des images d'êtres bizarres monstrueux, presque amorphes, comme des aérolithes." (P. 13). These are apparently foetuses to which the prostitutes had given birth at various times. He attributes these singularly inappropriate pictures to the influence of the periodical *Le Siècle* whose "manie de *progrès, de science, de diffusion des lumières*" alone, would have dictated such a choice of decoration. He concludes in a flash of insight that the brothel is financed by *Le Siècle*.

One of the monsters had, however, survived. Born in the house, he remains there as a living museum exhibit, curled up on a pedestal, beautiful of feature but hampered by "quelque chose de noirâtre qui tourne plusieurs fois autour de ses membres comme un gros serpent." On questioning, he explains that this "appendice monstrueux" grows out of his head to inordinate length. It presents the greatest difficulty on the occasion of the evening meal, when he is obliged to make his way painfully to the dining room and ~~to~~ place his appendage on a neighbouring chair. His embarassment is increased by the fact that he, being small and deformed, is obliged to sit next to "une fille grande et bien faite."

These explanations are offered with no sign of bitterness. At this point Jeanne Duval makes a noise in the room and Baudelaire's dream is over.

Butor's brilliant application of this dream to the poet's life and work cannot be followed step by step here, particularly as "Le commentaire se développe en spirale, à partir de ces données précises pour en étudier les tenants et aboutissants."[7] Some of the major themes, as Butor develops them, may be singled out, however, as of particular interest not only to the study of Baudelaire, but to the study of Butor himself. For it is another characteristic of criticism as he practises it, that it also reveals the critic. This is hinted at in the final sentences of the book:

> "Certains estimeront peut-être que, désirant parler de Baudelaire, je n'ai réussi à parler que de moi-même. Il vaudrait certainement mieux dire que c'est Baudelaire qui parlait de moi. Il parle de vous."

The subtle distinction is typical, but its appeal to the universality of art, though justified, cannot quite conceal the fact that the poet of *Les Fleurs du mal* and his work resemble Butor, and his, in certain very particular respects.

Butor's exegesis of the dream begins with its sexual content and his argument leads to the conclusion that Baudelaire, emasculated by the infamous *conseil judiciaire*, could only recover his virility by publishing a book. Being a poet is thus intimately bound up with masculine sexuality. But since it is at once a sign of election and an affliction, it confers not only virility but *la vérole*. Butor's demonstration that the poet's semen ("mon vénin" of the poem "A celle qui est trop gaie") is the equivalent of that other life-giving if sombre fluid, *l'encre*, is both fascinating and convincing. It increases the reader's understanding of Baudelaire's notion of the poet's mission, of his relations with women (Madame Sabatier in particular, in this instance) and of the poem which was dedicated to her. For Baudelaire, Madame Desbordes-Valmore notwithstanding, a woman poet was a contradiction in terms.

This equation of the poetic vocation with masculine sexuality, to which Baudelaire gave such definite expression, may be traced, *en filigrane*, hence in a more subdued form, in Butor's own work. Speaking of the part each new book had to play in "the orchestra of my books", he said to an interviewer:

> "It had to fill a hole somewhere. I am perhaps rather simply masculine in that respect. I have a tendency to see my work as a filling of holes. ... I am swimming, if I may say so, in a world of holes, in which I am always having to try and fill things here and there, and I know that some day perhaps, if everything goes all right, I'll fill that very urgent hole that I see in that particular direction."[8]

There seems to be little doubt that "that very urgent hole" is closely connected with the magical "goutte d'encre" which is the subject of a moving text from *Illustrations III*: "Le Foyer":

> "J'espère ... que j'obtiendrai enfin cette goutte d'encre que je cherche depuis mon enfance, laquelle tombant d'un pinceau sur une feuille de papier rendra soudain celle-ci toute blanche autour d'une lettre qui remplacera un discours, qui me fera respirer enfin, me rendra la parole enfin, une parole qui instaurera le silence dans la bastille, la transformera en espace où s'étirer les bras en regardant le paysage enfin, le paysage ou l'on se tait." (P. 19).

This is the same "goutte d'encre" that Jacques Revel (in *L'Emploi du temps*) and Pierre Vernier (in *Degrés*) seek so avidly, the quest usurping their normal sexual activity. The book that Léon Delmont (in *La Modification*) decides to write is also in part an effort to restore his manhood, the lack of which undermines his relations with both his wife and his mistress.

In his interpretation of Baudelaire's dream, Butor identifies the poet with "le petit monstre" and his *appendice monstrueux* with the suicide rope which strangled the poet Gérard de Nerval. Baudelaire's preoccupation with suicide recalls Butor's long discussion of the subject, as it is related to the writer, with Georges Charbonnier, in the course of which he refers to the book as "l'équivalent positif du suicide". This will be discussed in full in the chapter on *L'Emploi du temps*, but it is worth noting in the meantime that Revel refers to his diary as "ce cordon de phrases qui se love", an expression which becomes doubly significant when it is taken into account that the *appendice* of the little monster is also identified by Butor with a phallus.

The section in *Histoire Extraordinaire* dealing with *Le vin*, and in particular the sub-section "Une ivrognerie méthodique", illuminates an important theme in Baudelaire's work while exploring his relationship with Edgar Allan Poe. In Butor's interpretation, Baudelaire regarded Poe's drinking as a kind of suicide, willingly undertaken for the sake of his art, since for him it was not simply a vice, but "un moyen mnémonique, une méthode de travail", (P. 159), a means of inducing the visions to which his work gave expression. As such, its effects were ultimately beneficent, for others, if not for the poet. Then too there is an element of social criticism in Poe's dipsomania, a rejection of bourgeois American society, by the practice of the only poetry available to the destitute: "Le Vin des chiffonniers". Butor declares that:

> "Baudelaire n'a jamais varié dans sa défense de l'ivrognerie populaire, seule issue que la société concède à ses victimes les plus déshéritees. C'est un crime certes, de ne laisser que cette issue, mais c'est un crime encore plus grand d'essayer d'interdire même celle-là." (P. 164).

Reading this, one cannot but think of Jacques Revel and his drinking companion, the West Indian, Horace Buck, both of them outcasts in the city of Bleston, and one is reminded of the feverish drinking of that other outcast, Louis Lécuyer, at the party in *Passage de Milan*, of Pierre Vernier's mysterious bout of solitary drunkenness in *Degrés*, and of the "vin atroce" that is offered to Léon Delmont in his dream in *La Modification.* Obviously *Le Vin*, a major theme in Baudelaire's poetry, also plays an important part and related role in Butor's work.

It is a worthwhile exercise to read his essay "Les Paradis artificiels" in tandem with *Histoire Extraordinaire*, if only to note that the following passage is quoted by Butor in each of them, a sure indication of the hold that the ideas it expresses have on his imagination:

> "'C'est dans cette dépravation du sens de l'infini que gît, selon moi, la raison de tous les excès coupables, dans l'ivresse solitaire et concentrée du littérateur, qui, obligé de chercher dans l'opium un soulagement à une douleur physique, et ayant ainsi découvert une source de jouissances morbides, en a fait peu à peu son unique hygiène et comme le soleil de sa vie spirituelle, jusqu'à l'ivrognerie la plus répugnante des faubourgs, qui, le cerveau plein de flamme et de gloire, se roule ridiculement dans les ordures de la route.'" (HE, 165; R 1, 118).

Butor adds the comment that:

> "Le littérateur dont il est question ici est évidemment Thomas de Quincey, mais dans l'expression, 'ivresse solitaire et concentrée' nous reconnaissons bien aussi la 'méthode littéraire' d'Edgar Poe." (HE, 165).

Readers of Butor may recognise in it the *méthode de travail* of Jacques Revel, exiled in that sunless town where alcohol provided "le soleil de sa vie spirituelle", Bleston, alias Manchester, of which De Quincey was a native and to which one of the best known sentences in the *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* could certainly be applied:

> "It was a Sunday afternoon, wet and cheerless: and a duller spectacle this earth of ours has not to show than a rainy Sunday in London."[9]

Without going into Butor's discussion of Baudelaire's assessment of the relative merits of those three means of access to "Les paradis artificiels", wine, opium and hashish, it is important to note that the poet's chief objection to the last two was that they might eventually limit recourse to the most potent drug of all: poetry, which, however, has the power to counteract their ill-effects. Thus:

> "de Quincey ne réussit à se délivrer de son délicieux opium devenu un atroce tyran qu'en écrivant ses *Confessions*. De même que seule la poésie peut donner quelque durée à ce qui se dévoilaient sous l'empire du hashish, de même seule la poésie peut donner à l'individu quelque pouvoir sur cette matière onirique que l'opium déchaine." (R 1, 119).

All seekers after visions, whether drunkards, drug-addicts or poets, share the same motivation: "le goût de l'infini". This is the origin of Léon Delmont's symbolic thirst which the "vin atroce" of his dream cannot assuage, but only the living waters of poetry: represented by the book he will write. In Baudelaire's words, quoted by Butor:

> "Par l'exercise assidu de la volonté et la noblesse permanente de l'intention, nous avons créé à notre usage un jardin de vraie beauté. Confiants dans la parole qui dit que la foi transporte les montagnes, nous avons accompli le seul miracle dont Dieu nous ait octroyé la licence." (R 1, 118).

This is the Religion of Art, free of all decadent overtones, firmly asserting the moral force of poetry. All the evidence suggests that Butor subscribes to the same doctrine.

But if he and the poet of *Les Fleurs du mal* are related at a profound level, they are also connected in what might appear to be a more superficial way, by their names. This is brought out by the section of *Histoire Extraordinaire* called "Les Oiseaux", which interprets the birds "dont l'oeil est *vivant*" of Baudelaire's dream in terms of the poet as albatross/monster: "Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher," and of the tragic descent into aphasia which reduced his eloquence to a "langage de perroquet" (P. 239). Butor, whose name means "bittern", feelingly describes the mockery which Baudelaire must have endured as a result of puns on his name (Beau de l'aire). Commenting on the frequent mention of birds in his poetry (also a feature of Butor's work, particularly *Passage de Milan*), he says:

> "Une telle constance, il nous faut la relier au nom même de Baudelaire. Je sais ce qu'un enfant peut souffrir des plaisanteries faites sur son nom. En ce qui concerne notre poète, rappelons-nous quellé fureur provoquaient chez lui les fautes d'impression transformant Baudelaire en Beaudelaire. Il fit détruire à cause de celà toute l'édition de sa première traduction de la *Philosophie de l'ameublement* de Poe." (P. 223).

There seems then every reason to believe that for Butor "notre poète" is one of those very *intercesseurs* whose role in Baudelaire's artistic and spiritual life *Histoire Extraordinaire* so admirably exposes: "miroir de ce qu'il sera," "figure idéale de lui-même", not in the tragic shambles of his life, one would certainly hope, but in the poetry to which it gave tongue and in the dedication to art of which it was the ransom.

Saluting Baudelaire as "le pivot autour duquel la poèsie tourne pour devenir moderne", Butor emphasises that "Le coeur même de la pensée de Baudelaire est cette prise de conscience de la poésie.":

> "Baudelaire ne se contente pas de fabriquer des poèmes et de les mettre en vente comme des objets d'art; il n'est pas seulement poète, il est critique, et grand critique de lui-même; il ne lui suffit plus de commencer à comprendre lui-même ce qu'il fait, il lui est nécessaire d'essayer de donner à autrui le mode d'emploi de sa poésie, d'aider autrui à en faire une lecture correcte et entièrement fructueuse." (R 1, 116).

In his letter to Asselineau, Baudelaire described his dreams as a "langage hiéroglyphique dont je n'ai pas la clef"; "Un langage dont il nous donne la clef," Butor comments. The lucid *prise de conscience* had its counterpart in the deeps of the sub-conscious and it is this obscure current that *Histoire Extraordinaire* sets out to explore, using the keys that Baudelaire has provided, completing the poet's project of self-criticism, elucidating "la mode de l'emploi de sa poésie." "N'est-ce point là le projet de toute critique sérieuse?"

"Pour être juste ... la critique doit être ... politique."
Baudelaire

Clearly, Butor sees criticism as the necessary complement of art, making an essential contribution to its function. The influence of Marxist thought on Butor's view of what this function is, is also apparent. "Art, through an illusion, changes men and the changed men change the world to make that illusion a reality."[10] These words might have been Butor's, but they are in fact a summing up of the outlook of the English Marxist writer Christopher Caudwell, who has been credited with the first attempt at "a Marxist solution to the fundamental problems of aesthetics."[11] Butor evidently believes in the social function of art, that is to say that art, while it is a product of society, also reacts upon society as a whole, not just on individuals, and its goal is the increase of men's freedom.

> "Toute oeuvre est engagée, même la plus routinière, toute activité de l'esprit étant fonction dans une société; plus elle est profondément inventive et plus elle oblige à un changement.
>
> Le monde produit *progressivement* sa propre critique et s'invente en nous difficilement." (R 3, 20).

These closing sentences of "La Critique et L'Invention" echo the Marxist resonance of the title, but it would be wrong to extrapolate from this to the conclusion that Butor is a Marxist critic. For one thing his critical writing makes no overt attempt to analyse works in the light of strict Marxist dogma (he may be compared, in this respect, with Lucien Goldman, for example), and furthermore, the consistent emphasis he places on the virtue of the most daring inventiveness would seem to exceed the bounds of orthodox Marxist practice. His attitude to surrealism, for example, contrasts sharply with Sartre's or with Caudwell's, who regarded that movement with extreme disapproval. Whatever his personal political commitment may be, Butor's first commitment as a writer is to his art. His belief in the power of art to transform the world, though it may be reinforced by the doctrine of dialectic materialism, is not dependent upon it. Thus his belief in the efficacy of art does not lead him to condemn abstractionism, as it might the orthodox Marxist critic, but rather to extend the boundaries of realism. This has important implications for his critical method, since the representative properties of art are intimately connected with the problem of meaning.

"A poem should not mean, but be."

Archibald MacLeish

Butor's criticism aims at a "cohérence meilleure". Does it then conflict with the idea that "A poem should not mean, but be", to the degree that it presents itself as an interpretative grill? In the last analysis, I think not. In any case, as in all aphorisms nuance is here sacrificed to pithiness, whereas in Butor's treatment of it, the question of the autonomy of art appears in all its complexity. Given the emphasis he places on its powers of *mise-en rapport*, criticism necessarily implies exegesis. The following observations from one of his essays on Joyce indicate, however, that this exegesis is controlled by the organisation of the work under criticism. It grows from within, rather than being imposed from without.

> "Toute grille venant de l'extérieur, dont on aura pu montrer qu'elle s'applique, qu'on aura pu lire et retrouver dans l'ouvrage ne sera jamais qu'une parmi toutes celles que Joyce a essayé d'y intégrer, elle n'en rendra compte que partiellement elle ne sera qu'un de ses matériaux. Il est donc nécessaire d'essayer de saisir comment l'ouvrage se dispose ainsi de par sa logique intérieure..." (R 1, 231).

It has been remarked that Butor's critical writing totally lacks the apparatus of academic scholarship. It contains neither footnotes nor page references. Certain observations he has made regarding his study of Baudelaire indicate that this is deliberate:

> "je me situais volontairement en dehors de tout cursus universitaire en dehors de ce tissu de discussions exprimé par les notes, références, coups de chapeau ou de patte aux prédecesseurs etc." (R 2, 295).

To adapt the phenomenologists' dictum, his critical attitude seems to be one of "Back to the works themselves". His view that "toute grille venant de l'extérieur" can only be of relative value in the understanding of a work, together with the emphasis he places on interior logic, suggests that like Susan Sontag, he is Against Interpretation, or more accurately, literal interpretation. His entire work (not only his criticism) is manifestly For Meaning, however, and all his literary effort has been bent on deciphering and disclosing, as far as possible, the meaning of life and of art, taking their mutual inter-reaction into account. This is not to say that his books are intended to provide answers, but on the contrary, to ask what he believes to be the right questions.

It is important to note, however, that Butor does not reject external sources of illumination of a work of art outright. He merely says that they cannot entirely account for the coherence of the finished product. There can be no objection, therefore, to using such extraneous information to corroborate what a study of the work itself in terms of its own coherence, has revealed. That Butor does so himself is shown by *Histoire Extraordinaire*, which, though it has no references to Baudelaire *criticism*, refers frequently to Baudelaire's life and correspondence. It follows from Butor's belief in the efficacy of art that he believes it to be meaningful, and that its meaning is necessarily related to its historical and cultural situation, but that is not at all the same as attempting to provide a literal interpretation which attempts to usurp the work of art by presenting itself as its substitute. It is in its resistance to such attempts to explain it away, not in the refusal to signify, that art establishes its autonomy. A poem does indeed mean, but the meaning resides in its form, that is, its being. Meaning is not an essence which is distilled; it is immanent.

MacLeish's aphorism is related to Walter Pater's "All art constantly aspires to the condition of music", and Butor introduces his own variations on the theme in his essay "La Musique, art réaliste" (R 2, 27-42), which provides another interesting perspective on his criticism as well as illustrating some of the points made in this discussion.

La Musique, art réaliste

The paradox is bold almost to the point of crudeness, but the essay effectively underlines the limiting nature of the conventional interpretation of realism (the source of our initial shock reaction). This accounts for the fact, Butor argues, that while it is almost universally acknowledged that "... il n'est point de peinture ou de poésie sans signification, situation historique précise", the "capacités représentatives" of music remain underestimated or even denied. According to Butor, this is the direct result of a defective conception of reality, which is characterised by "une identification absolue du réel avec le visible, comme si nous n'avions pas d'autres sens."

In his view, since from its origins, sound was a warning or sign, and thus *meant* something, any conception of reality which embraces sound, necessarily abolishes any absolute distinction between nature and language, hence between matter and thought, so that everything becomes susceptible to interpretation, to the action of the intelligence. He declares music to be realistic because it teaches us something about the world, even in its most abstract forms; its grammar is "une grammaire du réel" and "les chants transforment la vie". (R 2, 28). Quoting Balzac's Massimilia Doni, he says: "L'art peint avec des mots, avec des sons, avec des couleurs, avec des lignes, avec des formes; si ses moyens sont divers, les effets sont les mêmes." Music is unique, however, in that it is "par l'art pur" that it achieves its effects and consequently its range is wider than that of either painting or literature:

> "'Chaque instrument ayant pour ses expressions la durée, le souffle ou la main de l'homme, est supérieur comme langage à la couleur qui est fixe, et au mot qui a des bornes. La langue musicale est indéfinie, elle contient tout, elle peut tout exprimer.'" (R 2, 31).

Thus the very non-representational qualities of music make it susceptible to the greatest charge of meaning. This is so, Butor argues, because music in anterior to language: "Ainsi la musique creuse le lit du texte, prépare, forme est espace dans lequel il peut se produire, se préciser de plus en plus." (R 2, 34). Languages may be regarded as particular cases of the use of musical structures. Furthermore, the fact that music can succeed in transforming an indifferent text (which many a libretto is) into something remarkable, suggests that in syntactical power, music outdoes articulated language.

As the "condition" of articulated language, music continually *tends* toward the spoken word, Butor says, and this tendency allows it to bring into being certain complex verbal structures which language alone could not attempt. Music is "l'antre ou peuvent se forger les armes et instruments d'une littérature nouvelle, le labourage du terrain sur lequel cette moisson pourra mûrir." (R 2, 35). It seems that if it is true for Butor that art, in its quest for rigorous form, aspires to the condition of music, music, for its part, aspires to the condition of language.

Having considered music as a language in its relation to articulated language, Butor then goes on to discuss the figurative power of musical colour, that is music as a language which is distinct from verbal expression and which operates by virtue of the affective colour or associations with which various rhythms, instruments and tones are imbued. He points out that "Le passage d'un mode à un autre fait contraster leurs deux couleurs; il est traditionnellement appelé *chromatisme*." (R 2, 37). Music may also have geographical and historical colour. It is possible to reproduce the musical colour of a people, as Chopin and Chabrier, for example, have done. Stravinsky has reproduced the colour of other composers and then modulated from one to another as in *The Rake's Progress*, thus opening up new avenues of expression. But since the system within which Stravinsky worked belonged to the past, the more modern musical colours could only be introduced in an ironic vein. Schonberg's dodecaphonic system, or rather Webern's interpretation of it "comme généralisation du concept de tonalité", offered him the framework within which the geographical and historical colours he had learned to manipulate could have free play. Contemporary music, Butor finds, is equipped with "des instruments d'une puissance significative inouie" and he regards it as a sign of great progress that popular forms such as jazz are now being absorbed. Music is no more a luxury than poetry or painting, Butor concludes, but is "indispensable à notre vie, à la vie de tous, et jamais nous n'en avons eu autant besoin." (R 2, 41).

"La Musique, art réaliste" is interesting from several points of view. It provides evidence of the wide range of Butor's criticism, which does not confine itself to literature, but is concerned with all the arts, while it exemplifies Butor's conviction that all art is meaningful and will yield to intelligent exegesis. It illustrates too his conception of the critic's role in accelerating the growth of "la posterité en expansion" and hence his contribution to the social function of art. From the point of view of Butor's aesthetics, it is a valuable indication of his belief in the interaction of the arts: as language evolved from the field of sound, new literary forms may be born of music.

Language, not just as words, but as a metaphor for a whole mode of expression, fascinates Butor but though he refuses to limit his critical activity to the consideration of words alone, he sees them invading every form of artistic endeavour. They appear in song, on musical scores, in inscriptions on buildings and in painting. In *Les mots dans la peinture*[12] we read:

> "Parler, chanter.
>
> Sur sa page souvent largement aussi grande qu'un tableau, admirablement réglée de portées, le compositeur non seulement sait disposer les mots, mais les dédoubler, les multiplier: apparitions, échos, annonces, toutes modulations, peut dire le peintre, qu'il nous donne par l'intermédiaire d'un dessin souvent commenté de longues légendes.
>
> Perspectives et polyphonie de textes." (P. 168).

It is not surprising then, that Butor believes that "nous devons travailler au livre ... comme à la partition d'une civilisation." (R 3, 403). This has been his life work and the notion of *le livre* has undergone a transformation in the course of his exploration of it. It was with the novel, however, that he began, and since the ensuing chapters will deal with his novels in order of publication, it seems appropriate to discuss, if only briefly, his two major essays on the genre which he once likened to "une colonne vertébrale."

Recherches sur la technique du roman

As far as the novel is concerned, Henry James must be counted among Butor's intercessors, to use Baudelaire's term. Like James, Butor discovered the novel to be "the most prodigious, the most elastic of literary forms", and it provided for him a solution to the conflict between poetry and philosophy which he experienced at the beginning of his career. Quoting James's dictum that "The novelist is he on whom nothing is lost", Butor declared in 1959 that "Il n'y a pas pour le moment de forme littéraire dont le pouvoir d'intégration soit aussi grand que celui du roman." (R 1, 272). The date is important because his attitude to the novel has developed since then, a development in which his essays have played an important part.

His conception of the novel seems to have undergone the same process of generalisation which, according to himself, the concept of tonality underwent within the dodecaphonic system. This evolution of Butor's thought does not mean that the essays in which he expressed his theory of the novel have ceased to be relevant. In studying them, we can see how the first phase of his creative writing opens onto the second and they will continue to be relevant to the novel as a genre, whether it takes the direction in which Butor is pointing or not.

The two essays that will be dealt with are: "Le roman comme recherche" (R 1, 7-11), Butor's first essay on the novel specifically, published in 1955, and "Recherches sur la technique du roman" (R 2, 88-99), published in 1963. The former came out between *Passage de Milan* and *L'Emploi du temps*, the latter in the same year as *Description de San Marco* and the year after *Mobile*. There is a touch of the manifesto about each of them because each expresses the essential points of Butor's theory of the novel at two different stages in his career and this makes them an appropriate choice to "represent" Butor's critical writing on the genre.

"Le Roman comme recherche" is principally concerned with what Butor calls the "application du roman à la réalité" and its aim is to show that the novel, though it is only a particular form of *récit* (the tissue of words through which we receive a large portion of our reality) is of decisive importance, since it wields a triple power: "de dénonciation, d'exploration et d'adaption..." in relation to "la conscience que nous avons du réel." It accomplishes this by exploring new forms, an activity which reveals the falsehood and inadequacy of the petrified *roman habituel (dénonciation)*, calls into being new facets of reality, since the imposition of form implies choice *(exploration)* and conversely endows the *récit* as a whole with the capacity to handle new realities *(adaptation)*.

Formal invention thus shows itself to be essential to genuine realism and not opposed to it, as is frequently claimed.

For Butor, a novel's "symbolism" means the sum of the relationships between what it tells us and the reality in which we live and these determine the novel's subject, and hence its form. It follows therefore that a new concept of the novel (of its relations with reality) entails new subjects and new forms, while conversely, new forms call up new subjects and reveal new relations with reality. That is why Butor believes that "A partir d'un certain degré de réflection, réalisme, formalisme et symbolisme dans le roman apparaissent comme constituant une indissociable unité." (R 1, 11). Formal experiment then, is anything but gratuitous, because all fruitful research in that field necessarily contributes not only to the evolution of the novel as a whole, but to the evolution of the whole of literature "qui se met à apparaître non plus comme simple délassement ou luxe, mais dans son rôle essentiel à l'intérieur du fonctionnement social, et comme expérience méthodique." (R 1, 11).

Most of Butor's beliefs about the function of literature and the writer's commitment are contained in this essay. The influence of phenomenology is apparent in his emphasis on the powers of integration which the novel displays and he calls the novel "le domaine phenoménologique par excellence", presumably because, like Husserl's method, it may be used not only in the analysis of the objects of consciousness but in viewing the act of consciousness itself. The wide sense in which Butor understands realism is also underlined, as is the true *engagement* of the writer which follows from it. Far from being a flight from responsibility, formal experiment can only increase the novel's efficacy as an instrument for exploring reality and for changing it.

"Recherches sur la technique du roman" begins with a restatement of the beliefs expressed in "Le roman comme recherche". "Un tel 'engagement' ne vaut-il pas tous les efforts?" (R 2, 90), Butor asks and then goes on in eight further sub-divisions of the text to discuss some of the efforts which will be required.

The treatment of time in the novel must be dealt with: "il faut donc étudier les structures de succession." (R 2, 91), and since a rigorously linear progression is in fact virtually impossible, the complicated question of temporal counterpoint presents itself. The term counterpoint indicates that there can be no haphazard juggling with flashbacks and the like, and neither can there be an uncontrolled treatment of discontinuity. "Il s'agit donc de préciser une technique de l'interruption et du saut, ceci en étudiant naturellement les rythmes objectifs sur lesquel repose en fait notre évaluation du temps," (R 2, 93), Butor says. Questions relating to time bring in their wake considerations on space. The two are intimately connected and in order to study time in its continuity, it is necessary to apply it to a given space. Bergson's famous sugar lump is an example. But the space in which we live is no more Euclid's than the time we pass is that of the clock. Butor interprets what he calls "ce nouveau réalisme optique" as an attempt to render space effectively, and for him this points to the necessity of considering the book itself as an object, of using its space systematically.

Then there is the question of the point of view, which is characterised for Butor by the use of particular pronouns. This "architecture pronominal" if properly manipulated "va permettre d'introduire dans un ensemble romanesque une clarté nouvelle et donc d'explorer, de dénoncer de nouvelles obscurités." (R 2, 97). The relations between time, place and persons, so important to the novelist, are, of course, the special province of grammar. Literature is primarily language and it is out of the manipulation of grammatical structure, in the struggle for expression, that the sentence, the paragraph, the book is painfully born. But if so much painstaking care is devoted to the order in which the material is presented, should not the writer ask himself if this is the only possible order? And if provision may be made for more than one, is it not his duty to exert control over all of them, over all the possible itineraries through its pages, as the sculptor takes into account all the angles from which his work may be viewed and photographed? *La Comédie Humaine* offers different points of access, but the events recounted in it remain constant. Butor dreams of a superior mobility which would permit the reader himself to choose what would happen in "le microcosme de l'oeuvre", where his every move would assume and confer meaning, often without his knowledge, as in life, "l'éclairant sur sa liberté." (R 2, 99).

When these two studies on the novel are placed side by side, it is evident that a generalisation, in Butor's sense of the word, has taken place on at least two levels. "Le roman comme recherche" has become part of a wider theory of the novel, reflecting the evolution of Butor's concept of the novel in the direction of *mobility*, organised space which the reader may explore at will, like a cathedral or a town. The notion of the novel as a social function, as "expérience méthodique" is in no way diminished, however. What has happened is that there has been a shift in emphasis. The novel remains an instrument of research in relation to reality but is itself the object of research as well. There has been an expansion of Butor's thought so that the first essay is *contained* within the second. From *contenant* it has become *contenu*, mirroring the progress of the novel itself in Butor's canon.

Butor was to discover that his early conviction that the novel resolved for him the conflict between poetry and philosophy had been precipitate. While the novel was fairly successful in absorbing his poetry, it was never entirely so with regard to the essays, which he kept on writing alongside the novels. His artistic life, which he had envisaged as developing along one strong curve, gradually became two. By 1962 he was saying that he again found himself confronted by three forms of literary activity,— the novel, the essay and the poem, but that this was no longer generative of tension because:

> "... la généralisation que j'ai dû faire subir à la notion de roman m'a permis de découvrir un monde de structures intermédiaires ou englobantes, et que je puis maintenant me promener librement dans un triangle dont les pointes extrèmes seraient le roman au sens courant, le poème au sens courant, l'essai tel qu'on le pratique d'habitude." (R 2, 295).

From being *the* solution, the novel had become part of a grander design. The essays on the novel may be likened to the prefaces which Henry James wrote for the New York edition of his books, which in James's own view:

> "... represented or demonstrated an artist's consciousness and the character of his work in some detail, made an essay in general criticism which had an interest and a being aside from any connection with his own work,

> and (that) finally, (they) added up to a fairly exhaustive reference book on the technical aspects of the art of fiction."[13]

Although Butor, unlike James, makes no specific reference to his own fiction, the connection between theory and practice is nonetheless clear. But if the essays on the novel may be singled out as being particularly important, all of the material collected in Butor's three *Répertoires*, even the occasional pieces, is interesting; intrinsically, and in the context of his *métaphysique*, which it illuminates at two levels: directly by frank statement of his views, and obliquely by his choice of subjects and method of treatment, or technique.

La Critique et l'invention

The sheer volume of Butor's critical writing, given that it is only a part of his total output, is remarkable in itself, quite apart from the acuity of its observation or the breadth of its range. It has not been possible to do more here than highlight some important examples, but even this rapid survey has indicated the variety of Butor's interests and the richness of his culture. He is no dilettante, but resembles rather the Renaissance Man (rare in this age of specialists) made even more formidable because armed with twentieth century technology. It is difficult to feel adequate to the task of criticising his work, therefore, and particularly his critical writing, since it gives explicit expression to the rich culture which is the sub-soil of his creative works. It becomes less daunting, however, if we can accept that his aim is not primarily to blind us with his knowledge, but to lend us the power of his insights, and if we find that many of his references reveal our own ignorance, we have only to turn to the relevant text for elucidation and our culture is enriched accordingly.

> "Les lectures de Shakespeare étaient variées et profondes. Cet inspiré était un étudiant. Faites donc des études si vous voulez le connaître."[14]

wrote Victor Hugo, to whom Butor has devoted three studies[15] (a classical illustration of the critic "qui ne peut supporter que l'on parle si peu ou si mal de tel livre...", in view of the *boutade*: "Victor Hugo, hélas!".) In one of these, Butor remarks that "comme il est assez facile malgré tout de remarquer ici où là quelques inexactitudes, on en profite pour essayer de récuser en bloc tout ce qu'on n'a pas le courage de vérifier." (R 3, 216). One feels that the recrimination is not only made on Hugo's behalf. Verifying Butor's references in fact presents something of a problem, since he deliberately eschews the apparatus of scholarly writing. But this has the effect not only of allowing Butor to "considérer l'oeuvre dans sa nudité,"[16] but of forcing the reader to make his own investigation of the text under criticism.

The lack of the trappings of academic critical writing does not, however, mean that Butor's work is not highly professional in the best sense; he has spent several years teaching literature. It is true that as a writer, Butor is best qualified as a *literary* critic, and that in his writing on the other arts he relies heavily on what has been called synthetic intuition, especially as far as the visual arts are concerned. But according to Erwin Panofsky, this faculty "which is comparable to that of a diagnostician" may be "better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar."[17] And if it is objected that the writer should stick to the last of literature, Butor's retort is that: "Quant à l'ecrivain, rien, absolument rien ne devrait lui être étranger". (R 2, 296).

A more serious objection to Butor's critical method is raised by the anonymous contributor to the "Times Literary Supplement" who complained of "his fierce desire to idealise", and suggested that Butor is mistaken in assuming the same degree of consciousness and lucidity on the part of other artists as he himself possesses:

> "Somehow in the act of creation as Butor recreates it there is no room for accident or slovenliness; if there is a deviation from a standard practice then this has to be wilful and univalent."[18]

There is probably some justification for this charge although the word "univalent" must immediately be disallowed on the grounds that it is entirely foreign to Butor's outlook, both as critic and writer. His desire to establish order is, however, undeniable (the title *Répertoire* is itself indicative of this) and he finds it difficult, if not impossible, to accept that any artist can function in a manner that is not conscious and meticulous. It is in fact on this premise that Butor's book on Montaigne, *Essais sur les Essais*, rests. It is a deliberate challenge to "cette thèse, généralement admise, de l'absence d'art de la composition, chez Montaigne."[19] In imposing a certain schema of composition on *Les Essais*, Butor may arrogate to himself the right to distort, though not to disfigure, Montaigne's work, as one critic points out, but all the same:

> "N'y a-t-il pas, dans une telle conception, un moyen de proposer à la critique de substantielles possibilités, d'approcher du secret de la création, peut-être même de la capter sur le vif?"[20]

The reviewer in the "Times Literary Supplement" has seen this, too ("the act of creation as Butor recreates it..."), but it has failed to satisfy him.

Butor makes no secret of his desire to achieve "une cohérence meilleure" by his criticism. And if the result is to make certain aspects of the work "plus forts et plus beaux", the writer under criticism would have no cause to feel betrayed, while Butor would have fulfilled what he considers to be criticism's main task: the completion of the artist's project.

Baudelaire, himself a critic of extraordinary range and brilliance, once wrote that "le meilleur compte rendu d'un tableau pourra être un sonnet ou une élégie." However, he went on:

> "ce genre de critique est destiné aux recueils de poésie et aux lecteurs poétiques. Quant à la critique proprement dite, j'espère que les philosophes comprendront ce que je vais dire: pour être juste, c'est-à-dire pour avoir sa raison d'être, la critique doit être partiale, passionée,

> politique, c'est-à-dire faite à un point de vue exclusif, mais au point de vue qui ouvre le plus d'horizons."[21]

Butor's criticism, which equals Baudelaire's own in its range, falls into both categories (La critique et l'invention). The criticism properly so called: partial, passionate, political, highly personal and *open*, may be found in the series of *Répertoires*, the "sonnets" and "élégies" in the series of *Illustrations*.

[1] Michel Butor, *Répertoire III*(Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1968), pp. 7-20.

[2] Ezra Pound, "Paris Letter," *The Dial* (May 1922), p. 626.

[3] Butor, "Le critique et son publique," *Répertoire II*, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964), p. 133.

[4] Henry James, Preface to *What Maisie Knew*, quoted by R. P. Blackmur, Introduction to *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. viii.

[5] Paris: Gallimard, 1961.

[6] Beckett's study of Proust is the most nearly comparable work, in quality, style and temper. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1931).

[7] See inside cover of *Histoire Extraordinaire*, a text which appears to have been written by Butor himself.

[8] *Twentieth Century Studies*, "Directions in the 'nouveau roman', Interview with Michel Butor," pp. 41-52, p. 45.

[9] Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, ed. with an introduction by Alethea Hayter (1821; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 70.

[10] David N. Margolies, *The Function of Literature: A Study of Christopher Caudwell's Aesthetics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), p. 125.

[11] G. T. George Thompson, Biographical Note, Christopher Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1946), p. 5.

[12] *Les Sentiers de la création* (Genève: Albert Skira, 1969), p. 168.

[13] R. P. Blackmur, op. cit., p. viii.

[14] Victor Hugo, Préface pour la nouvelle traduction de Shakespeare par François-Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome 2, ed. Jean Massin (Paris: Le Club Français du livre, mcmlxix), p. 331, quoted by Butor, *Répertoire 3*, p. 217.

[15] "La voix qui sort de l'ombre et le poison qui transpire à travers les murs," R 3, 185-213.
"Germe d'encre," R 3, 215-239.
"Babel en creux," R 2, 215-242.

[16] Jean Roudaut, *Michel Butor ou le livre futur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 14.

[17] Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), p. 38.

[18] Anon., "Butor in the pursuit of modernism," review of Michel Butor, *La Rose des vents*, *Illustrations 2*, *Les Mots dans la peinture* and *Inventory*, ed. Richard Howard, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 January 1971, p. 10.

[19] Georges Dupeyron, "Montaigne vu par un ecrivain d'aujourd'hui," *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, juillet-septembre 1965, pp. 20-25, p. 21.

[20] Dupeyron, p. 24.

[21] Charles Baudelaire, "A quoi bon la critique," *Salon de 1846*, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. revised and completed Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 876-878.

A Commonplace Book

First Flight

"Mais évidemment j'avais essayé, comme, je crois, la plupart des écrivains dans leur premier livre, j'avais essayé d'y mettre tout."[1] Thus Butor of his first book *Passage de Milan*,[2] published in 1954. Since he has further declared that each successive book has been written in an attempt to resolve the problems raised by the writing of its predecessor, the interest in treating *Passage de Milan* as the repository of Butor's subsequent preoccupations in embryo, so to speak, seems evident. Read from this angle, the novel not only provides abundant evidence of the accuracy of Butor's remark to Charbonnier, but suggests that *Passage de Milan* contains not only *tout* as Butor then consciously apprehended it, but that it is a kind of *Ur* - novel, where the sources of all Butor's writing may be found.[3] In so far as it is true that fiction tends towards autobiography, and the history of the realistic novel indicates that it does, *Passage de Milan* contains not only the seeds of Butor's future work but also Butor the man and artist as he is today, in embryo: Butor the man, whose response to life finds expression in art and who has progressed from the *Bildungsroman* of his first book to the *Kunstlerroman* of *Degrés*. For *Passage de Milan* and not *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune Singe*, is the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Butor's work.

Not that Butor can be explicitly identified with any one of the characters in the book (not even Louis Lécuyer, whose flight into Egypt parallels his own) as Joyce is identified with Stephen Dedalus. On the evidence of Georges Raillard, Butor is naturally secretive, and his reticence would preclude the adoption of any readily identifiable alter ego. Yet on his own admission, a very strong autobiographical element informs the book generally:

> " ... il y a dans ce livre un effort pour connaître mon enfance et mon adolescence c'est-à-dire tout le temps que j'ai vécu chez mes parents, pour le connaître, pour en prendre conscience et en même temps pour m'en detacher;" (Entretiens, 87).

Joyce/Stephen's declared aim was more grandiloquently phrased: "...to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.", but this ambition was all one with his refusal to serve "...that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church."[4], and, like Butor, one of the arms he chose was exile.

The very richness of Butor's first book makes orderly analysis difficult, but this is not to say that *Passage de Milan* lacks form. On the contrary, "c'était déjà un livre très réfléchi.", as Butor somewhat sharply reminds Georges Charbonnier, when the latter suggests that there is a spontaneity amounting almost to a want of order in this novel (Entretiens, 48).

Certainly one can see what Charbonnier meant, if one compares the complex and highly ordered structure of *Degrés*, say, with the organisation of *Passage de Milan*, which even Butor concedes, "reste flou", but all the same, this is a relative rather than an absolute distinction and in his first book, Butor's preoccupation with form is already very apparent. Michel Carrouges noted this in one of the few perceptive reviews to appear, saying:

> "... en ce temps où de bons esprits pour se distraire s'en vont répétant que le roman meurt faute de structure, l'oeuvre de M. Butor est un modèle de rigueur."[5]

Carrouges may have spoken more truly than he knew, for there is something of the model, in another sense, of the architect's *maquette*, in *Passage de Milan*, which is about number 15 in the street of that name, a typical Parisian apartment building. It should be noted that it is a reconstruction of the *building* and not only of the life there:[6]

> "Il s'agissait vraiment, de l'extérieur de Paris, d'essayer de reconstituer mentalement ce que pouvait être Paris. Non pas le Paris de la *vie parisienne*, évidemment, mais ces blocs qui forment la matière même de Paris, ces immeubles les uns à côté des autres." (Entretiens, 51).

The six floors of the building are occupied in ascending order as follows: on the first floor, Alexis and Jean Ralon (both priests) and their widowed mother, above them the numerous Mogne family, which includes M. Mogne's father and his wife's mother, as well as three of their five children, and on the third floor Samuel Léonard, a wealthy Jewish Egyptologist, who lives with his "niece" Henriette Ledu. Above them are the Vertigues family, also wealthy, with one adored daughter, Angèle. The fifth floor is occupied by the artist Martin de Vere, with his wife and small children, and their lodger, Gaston Mourre. Finally, the sixth floor houses various servants: Charlotte from the Ralon household, Madame Phyllis the cook and Ahmed the Egyptian "boy" employed by Léonard, Elizabeth Mercadier, the old servant of former tenants who died in a plane crash, as well as Louis Lécuyer, poor cousin of the two *curés* and the two elder Mogne boys, Vincent and Gérard.

The action, which takes place between the hours of seven in the evening and seven the following morning, centres around the party given to celebrate the twentieth birthday of Angèle Vertigues, which all the young people in the building attend and which affects nearly all the tenants and indeed all the visitors to 15 Passage de Milan in some way. The festivities have a macabre ending, however, in the killing of Angèle by Louis Lécuyer, whose subsequent escape to Egypt is organised by Samuel Léonard.

The vertical and horizontal lines of its structure are an indication of Butor's strong desire to impose order on the heterogeneous material of *Passage de Milan*. The grid, based on the hours of the night and the six floors of the building, which supports the novel, is evidence that Butor was preoccupied with the architectural qualities of the book and with what he has called "l'espace du roman" from the first.

Although ingenious enough in its application to the novel, this schema is relatively unsophisticated however; perhaps even somewhat rigid in its simplicity. If one were to compare it with the plan for *Degrés*, the distance travelled by him in the interim would be seen to be considerable. However, it is nonetheless clear that *Passage de Milan* marks the beginning of a process which would eventually lead to works such as *Mobile*.

The schema of *Passage de Milan* is twice *mis en abyme* in the book itself (a procedure with which Butor's readers were subsequently to become familiar[7]): once in the unfinished painting of Martin de Vere: "le tableau inachevé semblable à un emploi du temps, douze carrés sur fond gris..."[8] (P. 111), once in the evocation of the bas-reliefs decorating one of the tombs of Saqqarah, which were themselves a source of inspiration to de Vere. The artist responsible for these bas-reliefs had employed the traditional ancient device of registers or rows:

> "'...ces groupes d'oiseaux tournant la tête de différents côtés, les corps des marins dans les bateaux successifs, et les porteuses d'offrandes, telles de vivantes barres de mesure entre lesquelles se jouent des mélodies de canards, de fleurs et de paniers. L'artiste de Béni-Hassan fait passer d'une danseuse ou d'un guerrier à l'autre par la continuation d'un même mouvement, mais dans les grandes frises des lutteurs, chaque fois un noir et un rouge, il a mêlé les instantanés successifs de divers combats, de telle sorte que les séries de figures s'enlacent dans un immense contrepoint.'" (P. 112).

This short passage contains references to many of the themes of *Passage de Milan*. Firstly there is the overt reference to Egypt, then there are the birds, which play an important role in the book, and, then "les lutteurs" and "les danseuses", figures of the guests at Angèle's party, "les lutteurs", black and red, being also identifiable with the knaves in the pack of cards, who appear in de Vere's painting and who, in the novel, are figures of Angèle's suitors. However, the point to note at the moment is the manner in which the painter has combined narrative, painting and music in his work. (There is a relationship with architecture too, since the painting decorates the wall of a tomb.) Bearing in mind the schema for the novel, the description of the work of the artist of Béni-Hassan may be compared with the following paragraph from Butor's essay "L'Espace du roman":

> "Le musicien projette sa composition dans l'espace de son papier réglé, l'horizontale devenant le cours du temps, la verticale la détermination des différents instrumentistes; de même le romancier peut disposer différentes histoires individuelles dans un solide divisé en étages, par exemple un immeuble parisien, les relations verticales entre les différents objets ou événements pouvant être aussi expressives que celles entre la flûte et le violon." (R 2, 48).

Here Butor makes explicit the instructions on how to read his first novel which had been implicit in the book itself but which many of his readers had failed to recognise, just as the door-bells which ring on every floor of 15 Passage de Milan on the fateful night seem to emanate from a single instrument "mais nul de la maison ne peut entendre l'air dans son entier." (P. 87).

The highly organised framework of *Passage de Milan* calls to mind the classical unities, certainly those of time and place, unity of action being perhaps more problematic. This impression is reinforced by the frequent recurrence throughout the book of phrases from the vocabulary of the theatre. Terms such as "entrer en scène", "coulisses", "les deux derniers trois coups", recur, somewhat too predictably, one tends to think, at least on the third or fourth reading of the book. This use of theatrical convention is also a feature of Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel, *Les Gommes*, which is divided into five "acts" with prologue and epilogue and conforms to the unities of time and action and to a lesser degree, place. Furthermore, there is a crime, or more accurately, an act of violence, at the heart of both books, and both are affiliated to the detective novel in varying degrees. Robbe-Grillet's book appeared in 1953, the year before *Passage de Milan*, but since the latter had been written by late 1951[9], the possibility of mutual influence is effectively ruled out.

This makes it all the more interesting to speculate on the reasons why the first books of these two practitioners of "le nouveau roman" should so curiously resemble each other at certain points. One must not exaggerate, of course; the differences between *Les Gommes* and *Passage de Milan* are proportionately much greater than their similarities, but the fact that they resemble each other at all is evidence in support of that community of views among new novelists which was postulated earlier, and it is legitimate to ponder on the use made in both books of theatrical convention and the detective story.

Classical Tragedy and the "Whodunit" are not unrelated, although initially, their juxtaposition might appear incongruous. As long ago as 1948 W. H. Auden suggested that the detective story exemplifies the Aristotelian description of Tragedy in that it embodies Concealment, Manifestation, Peripateia and Catharsis.[10] Arguing that in neither genre are the characters changed in or by their actions, Auden concludes that Time and Space, therefore, are simply the when and where of revealing either what has to happen or what has actually happened. "In consequence," he says, "the Detective Story probably should ... obey the classical unities." On Auden's evidence, therefore, it would appear that the observance of the unities in *Les Gommes* and *Passage de Milan* follows from their adoption of the *roman policier* form. However, it should be borne in mind that, despite their affinity with Greek Tragedy, Detective Novels remain for Auden escape literature and not works of art, because the satisfaction they offer is the illusion of being dissociated from the murderer, whereas a work of art would compel the reader to identify in some degree with him and to share in his guilt. In Auden's case, therefore, the analogy between the Detective Story and Tragedy exists on a quite superficial level; it is a matter of convention rather than essence.

In contrast, when André Malraux wrote that William Faulkner's novel *Sanctuary* marked the intrusion of the Greek Tragedy into the Detective Novel[11], he meant something quite different from Auden's remarks. It is evident that he was speaking of the essential and not the conventional aspect of Tragedy and that he very definitely considered Faulkner's novel to be a work of art. The Detective Novel as interpreted by the new novelists also demands to be considered as a work of art and the conventions of the genre (circular intrigue, inquisitorial tone, suspense) are employed to that end. As Ludovic Janvier has observed, "le Nouveau Roman c'est le roman policier pris au sérieux."[12]

But why was the Detective Story ~~so~~ attractive to the *nouveaux romanciers*? The reason is implicit in their rejection of the conventions of the nineteenth century novel, which express a positivist world-view and rest on the assumption that Life and Reality are not only meaningful but transparently so. For the new novelists, "L'Univers romanesque a cessé d'être un monde qui se prête aimablement à l'inventaire et à l'analyse, pour devenir un monde inconnu, roulant sur des logarithmes, des symboles et des correspondances."[13] Hence, Reality apprehended as a cryptogram is appropriately rendered by the novelist under that form whose raison d'être is the solving of mysteries - the Detective Story: an excellent illustration, incidentally, of the link between *technique* and *métaphysique*.

Scénes de la vie privée

Butor's avowed intention that his first book should be a representation of the physical reality of Paris, ("ces blocs qui forment la matière même de Paris..."), should not be construed as precluding a description of the social reality of the capital at the same time, and in fact, a vertical section of 15 Passage de Milan reveals a "superposition des couches humaines qui composent la société"[14] worthy of Balzac himself. Representatives of the different classes are neatly arranged in strata both literally and metaphorically. "The working class lodges on the fringe of society, the ground floor and the sixth, then follow the artists and priests, while the rich bourgeoisie nestles in the heart of the building."[15] Indeed the spirit of Balzac haunts *Passage de Milan.*

Louis Lécuyer, "mal fringué", the country cousin ill at ease in an urban milieu, recalls Rastignac, for example, just as the equivocal figure of Samuel Léonard, rich, powerful, vaguely sinister and homosexual, bears a strong resemblance to Vautrin, and the relationship between Lécuyer and Léonard echoes that which existed between their prototypes.

Although their intrinsic interest is undeniable, the real significance of such echoes is that they are concentrations, as it were, of that community of outlook between Butor and Balzac which is diffused throughout *Passage de Milan*, the principle effect of which is to leave Butor's novel open to just such a superficial reading as has been accorded by so many to *La Comédie Humaine*. While focusing on the realism of either writer the reader often fails to appreciate his Realism and both novelists are mistaken for *"romanciers-arpenteurs"* when they belong instead to the race of *"romanciers-démiurges"*.

Two texts from *Répertoire*, "L'Espace du Roman" and "philosophie de l'ameublement", illustrate this contention, and are particularly relevant to *Passage de Milan* which, of all Butor's books, is the most explicitly concerned with the principle, formulated by the author of *La Comédie Humaine*, that:

> "... l'homme, par une loi qui est à rechercher, tend à représenter ses moeurs, sa pensée et sa vie dans tout ce qu'il approprie à ses besoins."[16]

A number of the ideas they contain are common to both essays, but it is in "La philosophie de l'ameublement" that Butor conducts a highly revelatory analysis of Balzac's "théorie des objets". Quoting extensively from *La Peau de*

Chagrin, he points out that Balzac regarded objects as "les os des temps" from which, following Cuvier's example, whole worlds might be reconstructed in the same manner in which "notre immortel naturaliste [i.e. Cuvier] a reconstruit des mondes avec des os blanchis".^{17} "Emporté par son [Cuvier's] génie, avez-vous plané sur l'abîme sans bornes du passé, comme soutenu par la main d'un enchanteur?", Balzac asks, in terms which are curiously appropriate to Butor's first novel. (R 2, 57). 15 Passage de Milan represents Butor's past (and the past of many of his contemporaries) and the narrative form of the novel, in which several interior monologues are combined with the commentary of an omniscient narrator, functions rather like "la main d'un enchanteur", supporting the reader throughout the length of the book so that he does not question the preternatural completeness of the data which he is given. The verb *planer* evokes the position adopted by narrator and reader vis-à-vis the apartment building, of which we are given a "bird's-eye view", and it also describes the motion of the kite to whose passing the title makes punning reference.^{18}

But to return to Balzac's *théorie des objets*: he regarded objects, Butor concludes, as "les fossiles de la réalité humaine, et tant qu'elle n'est pas morte, ils en sont déjà les ossements, le squelette externe." (R 2, 57).

This dual role of things is intimately connected with that "référence à l'Egypte" (Butor's own phrase) which is inserted in *Passage de Milan*. As "fossiles de la réalité humaine" they recall the work of the archaeologist, for whom artifacts are so important, and archeology at once evokes Egypt. Then, too, it was in the little Egyptian village of Minieh that Butor had a very real personal experience of objects as "la squelette externe de la réalité", when he had to provide himself with a table. This article of furniture was virtually unknown, and for the Egyptians, unnecessary, and Butor foresaw that its introduction would have wide repercussions on their civilisation, provoking "jusque dans les gestes les plus courants une perturbation et un désarroi gigantesque."[19]

As far as the novel is concerned, therefore, the description of the milieu or décor is an indispensable adjunct to the depiction of individuals and of social classes, as well as to the setting of the action in a particular period or place; not simply for considerations of conventional realism, or exotism, but because "l'ameublement dans le roman" can be at once highly revelatory and endowed with great poetic power.

"Ainsi lorsque Balzac nous décrit l'ameublement d'un salon, c'est l'histoire de la famille qui l'occupe qu'il nous décrit.", Butor writes. (R 2, 54) Readers of *Passage de Milan* will feel that this is equally true of Butor himself and furthermore, the superposition of identical units which the structure of the novel imposes, allows him to achieve an effect which was beyond Balzac's range, for historical reasons. The fact that the apartments share an identical structure and lay-out throws the furnishings of each tenant and their arrangement into sharper relief and is thus revelatory to an even greater degree of the tastes, the income and the preoccupations of each household. The play between this structural uniformity and decorative disparity is brought out all through *Passage de Milan* and nowhere more strikingly than in the sharply contrasted descriptions of the dining rooms in the Mogne and Ralon apartments.

The *curés*, their mother and cousin dine luxuriously from blue and white china set on gleaming linen and flanked by polished silver. Les Mogne are crowded around a table covered in "toile cirée jaunâtre" (although they have guests) lit by a "lustre à abat jour de papier jaune". The serving spoons which protrude from the dishes of purée are "métal anglais" and the glasses are a motley assortment: "... on dépend des marchands de moutarde..." (P. 48). These differences are not simply the reflection of different economic circumstances, they also point up the gourmandise of the priests, which is somewhat at variance with their calling, and it is highly significant that their apartment has no *salon*, the family coming together only to eat, while otherwise living alongside each other in isolation. Les Mogne, in contrast, feel the need of a communal room where all can gather for purposes other than eating, and this in spite of over-crowding and the inevitable tensions of family life. Likewise, their meal has a ritual character and a feeling of community about it which is absent from the Ralon table, for all its superlative food and elegant setting.

Les Nourritures terrestres: Le Cru et le cuit

The role played by food in *Passage de Milan* is, in fact, of the highest importance. Always knowledgeably and accurately described, it is an invaluable clue to the life-style of each household and a comparison of the food served on each floor could be adduced as an instance of Butor's faith in the revelatory power of things. Furthermore, the many descriptions of meals and even of their remains have something of the quality of *natures mortes*, reminding us of Butor's interest in painting, and of his claim that writer and artist have much in common, since both are engaged in covering a surface.

He is concerned to bring out the importance of food in the life of French people generally, and in particular, in the life of the bourgeoisie, and his attitude is an admixture of criticism and nostalgia. It will be remembered that *Passage de Milan* was written partly in Egypt, partly in Manchester, and whatever the limitations of Arab cooking may be, it is clear from *L'Emploi du temps*, which is set in England, that that country was for Butor a gastronomic desert. That the pièce de resistance at the Vertigues party should rejoice in the name of *assiettes anglaises* is therefore a delicious irony. Space does not permit of a lengthy enumeration of the many descriptions of food which occur throughout the novel, but the following are among the most striking.

Chez les Ralon, Charlotte presents "les navets transformés par ses soins en fondants îlots sous une écume couleur de bas de soie (P. 55), while at the Mogne table, "Quelques brins de poireau pendent à la louche comme des algues". (P. 50) (The smooth as silk texture and appetising caramel colour of the stocking is in sharp contrast with the displeasingly slimy quality of the seaweed.) When the artist, Martin de Vere's children have dined, "Trois petits fauteuils restent vides, auprès de la table basse où des restes de purée voisinent avec des épluchures d'orange". (P. 41). Bénédicte, a guest at the Vertigues, surveys a slice of sausage with a mixture of cupidity and regret reminiscent of the Walrus and the Carpenter: "Et cette tranche de mortadelle ravissante avec son grain de pistache juste, on a presque regret de la manger". (P. 178).

Of course these descriptions also serve to keep up the Egyptian theme since food was always provided for the dead in their tombs, either mummified or fresh or even *represented* in the wall-paintings. *Porteuses d'offrandes* were frequently depicted bearing gifts of food to propitiate the gods Osiris or Anubis, and it is significant that Gertrude, the gauche young servant of the Vertigues household, is described as a *porteuse d'offrandes* when she is despatched with goodies to placate the concierge (a sop to Cerberus?) who guards the entrance not only of the building, but of the *cave* - the underworld.

Finally, it is worth noting that Butor's treatment of food in *Passage de Milan* is evocative of certain essays by Roland Barthes, notably perhaps, those in the collection entitled *Mythologies*. In Butor's novel, food (and, of course, clothes and décor too) is quite clearly presented as a code or language and is so interpreted by the reader and also by the characters of the novel itself. For example, Angèle's parents and the other guests at the party immediately and intuitively "get the message" transmitted by Clara Grumeaux's appearance before she has even opened her mouth. Furthermore, these factors, coupled with the importance, in *Passage de Milan* of family relationships and myth, not to mention the half-submerged theme of incest, call to mind the research of Lévi-Strauss. However, since the vast bulk of his work, as of Barthes's, appeared after 1953, are we to conclude that Butor practised structuralism without knowing it, as M. Jourdain spoke prose? An adequate answer to this question would involve a discussion of the immensely complicated procedures of structuralism which cannot be undertaken here. The following brief comments must suffice.

Butor's remark to Georges Charbonnier that when writing his first novel "j'avais besoin de reconstituer ce qu'avait pû être ma vie parisienne, j'avais besoin d'une représentation de Paris.", and that *Passage de Milan* is "la reconstitution d'un échantillon de la ville de Paris" seem to have something in common with Lévi-Strauss's conception of the work of art as a "modèle réduit" and with Barthes's observation that:

> "Le but de toute activité structuraliste... est de reconstituer un objet de façon à manifester dans cette reconstitution les règles du fonctionnement (les "fonctions") de cet objet."[20]

It is significant that the notion of *reconstitution*, crucial to structuralism, is twice referred to by Butor in the course of the two short sentences quoted above. As to the notion of "le modèle réduit", Lévi-Strauss had this to say in *La Pensée Sauvage*:

> " ... la question se pose de savoir si le modèle réduit, ... n'offre pas, toujours et partout, le type même de l'oeuvre d'art. Car il semble bien que tout modèle réduit ait vocation esthétique - et d'où tirerait-il cette vertu constante, sinon de ses dimensions mêmes? - inversement, l'immense majorité des oeuvres d'art sont aussi des modèles réduits."[21]

Arguing that science works on a full scale whereas art employs a reduced scale, Lévi-Strauss remarks that: "La première démarche est de l'ordre de la métonymie, elle remplace un être par un autre être, un effet par sa cause, tandis que la seconde est de l'ordre de la métaphore", and he concludes that "la vertu intrinsèque du modèle réduit est qu'il compense la rénonciation à des dimensions sensibles par l'acquisition de dimensions intelligibles".[22]

The application of these remarks to *Passage de Milan*, itself a "modèle réduit" of life in a Paris apartment building in the 1950's and of Butor's early years, is clear. Indeed 15 Passage de Milan is a "modèle réduit" of Paris itself. But before drawing any conclusions about Butor and structuralism, at least one caveat must be issued.

It has been said of Lévi-Strauss that: "Son désir est de dire scientifiquement de qui est perçu esthétiquement dans l'art."[23] This implies that structuralism explicates what art is capable of grasping and conveying intuitively. To suggest that Butor consciously applied the structuralist method in *Passage de Milan* would be to commit an anachronism. Butor's interviews with Charbonnier were recorded in 1967, *eighteen years* after *Passage de Milan* was written. In the interim, structuralism had become established and it is not impossible that looking back at his first novel, he expressed himself in terms made current by criticism in the sixties and which he might not have employed in 1951. This is not to say that his description of his first novel as "la reconstitution d'un échantillon de la ville de Paris" is false, of course.

However, when all is said, Butor and Lévi-Strauss have much in common. In addition to the knowledge and appreciation of music, which has marked the form of their books, there are Lévi-Strauss's three declared *maîtresses*: "Freud, Marx et la géologie"[24], which have also been objects of interest to Butor.

Lévi-Strauss's description of the aim of geology as the recovery of "un maître-sens, obscur sans doute mais dont chacun des autres est la transposition partielle ou déformée"[25] has been applied to structuralism itself. It might also be fittingly applied to the works of Butor with particular reference to the strata of 15 Passage de Milan and to Balzac's debt to Cuvier. But with regard to Structuralism and the work of Lévi-Strauss in relation to Butor's novels, perhaps the wisest conclusion is that drawn by Baudelaire when writing of other doctrines and other artists in 1848: " ... toutes ces théories récentes sont quelquefois tombées par un accident singulier dans la tête des poètes, en même temps que dans les têtes savantes."[26]

La Poésie du roman

There is, then, a community of outlook between Balzac and Butor which is expressed in *Passage de Milan* by the description of objects and décor – "l'ameublement du roman". Critics who have commented on this aspect of the novel have done so in rather a curious way. Either they have insisted that this "neo-realism" of Butor's is only apparent or else they have maintained, as in the case of Albérès, that if Balzac and Butor share the same *vision* "la *construction* et l'*intention* sont différentes." (Yet Albérès has declared, almost in the same breath, that: *Passage de Milan* "est présenté selon *une vision si inhabituelle* qu'il produit une impression *ésotérique*.",[27] which seems to be somewhat contradictory.) The implication that Butor's novel would be a lesser thing if its realism were "genuine" or if his debt to Balzac were seen to be too great, derives from a severely limited understanding both of realism and of Balzac with which Butor himself would certainly quarrel.

"'Béethoven est dépassé par la nouvelle école', dit dédaigneusement le compositeur de romances. 'Il n'est pas encore compris', dit le comte, 'comment serait-il dépassé'?"[28] This exchange from one of Balzac's own novels expresses Butor's attitude to the author of *La*

Comédie Humaine. His admiration for Balzac is as profound as his irritation at the superficial reading that his work often receives and indeed he regards the absorption of Balzac's influence as the sine qua non of modernity. The writer whose declared ambition it was to "forcer l'arcane de la nature" cannot be said to differ greatly in intention, after all, from the author of *Passage de Milan*. As to construction, Albérès argues that Butor's novel lacks completely the suspense and intrigue which characterise novels of the realist persuasion. If so, *Passage de Milan* was an unfortunate choice of example. Suspense mounts right through the novel, and on several different counts (will the party be a success? who will win Angèle's favour? will Henri Delétang's theft succeed? will Léonard surprise Vincent Mogne in Ahmed's bed?). It is evident from these examples that there is perhaps a surplus rather than a dearth of intrigue.

Realism entails more than the description of external reality, to which it is frequently reduced. It remains true, however, that such description is essential to the concept and that it is, in consequence, inextricably bound up with the demand that the novel give the illusion of life as it is or has been lived in the actual world. This caused André Breton to condemn the novel on the grounds that it is concerned only with "les moments nuls"[29] of life, an attitude which has a parallel in Proust's rejection of "la littérature qui se contente de 'décrire les choses'" and is therefore, in his view, "la plus eloignée de la réalité".^{30} It is Butor's distinction that he has accepted the obligation that the novel present itself as a "fragment illusoire du quotidien" while perceiving that it is precisely in this, its most banal and despised aspect, that the poetry of the novel lies.

The poetic power inherent in the description of objects, says Butor, (R 2, 8) derives initially from the mesmeric faculty which such description confers on the novelist. It is by virtue of this power that the immediate surroundings of the reader are made to dissolve in favour of "un autre lieu, hanté par le décor de ce qui est décrit, narré" (R 2, 58). The *romancier-demiurge* is clearly implied here, with his powers of evocation in the precise magical sense of the word and the objects he calls forth are transmuted, as by alchemy, into "mots" which tell us of the habits of thought and action of those whom they surround.

It should be noted here that Butor will have no truck with "Bien écrire" and the purple patch. For him the poetry of the novel resides not in isolated "gems" but inheres in the structure as a whole and he argues with typically paradoxical verve that "la poésie romanesque" derives from the novel's very realism, which is the origin for the reader "de tout un voyage dans l'histoire et l'esprit." (R 2, 10). This is to be accomplished by means of "une prosodie généralisée", by the use of "des formes suffisamment fortes" (that is, the instruments of poetry properly so called) in order that "des pans entiers de banalité, de réalité quotidienne, ... vont luire d'une phosphorescence inattendue." (R 2, 24). For, since the novel, by virtue of its realism, maintains the vital connection with the banality of everyday life (which poetry, by its "sacred" character, often severs), it has the power to make that banality meaningful and hence "la Poésie romanesque est donc ce par l'intermédiaire de quoi la réalité dans son ensemble peut prendre conscience d'elle-même pour se critiquer et se transformer." (R 2, 26).

The opening section of the final volume of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is relevant to these views of Butor. In it Proust takes his stand against "realism" à la Goncourt, against the novel as "une sorte de défilé cinématographique des choses." (P.882). Quite clearly, those moments of revelation, of resurrection of our dead selves, which Proust's great novel celebrates and which are its corner-stones, are at the opposite pole to Breton's "moments nuls". And yet what could be more banal than their stimuli - a madeleine, a boot button, uneven cobbles, the clink of a spoon against a plate? The world of objects is not the *real* world for Proust and yet, through our senses it may lead each of us to his individual reality. This is true not only for what he called *réminiscences* but also for his *impressions* "qui cachaient non une sensation d'autrefois mais *une vérité nouvelle*", like the steeples of Martinville: impressions beneath which lay:

> " ... quelque chose de toute autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir, une pensée qu'ils traduisaient à la façon de ces caractères hiéroglyphiques qu'on croirait représenter seulement des objets matériels." (P. 879).

It is Proust's *impressions* rather than his *réminiscences* that seem primarily to interest Butor. The novelist for him is:

> " ... celui qui aperçoit qu'une structure est en train de s'esquisser dans ce qui l'entoure, et qui va poursuivre cette structure, la faire croître, la perfectionner, l'étudier, jusqu'au moment ou elle sera lisible pour tous." (R 2, 25).

His criticism of our knowledge of reality is as pointed as Proust's, who declared that:

> " ... l'art prétendu réaliste ... ne serait pas si mensonger si nous n'avions pris l'habitude de donner à ce que nous sentons une expression qui en diffère tellement, et que nous prenons au bout de peu dè temps pour la réalité même." (P. 881).

The dwellers in 15 Passage de Milan are blind and deaf to the forces that ebb and flow in their microcosm.

Butor's originality lies in his use of "l'art prétendu réaliste", despised by Proust, in order to show us how false our conception of reality commonly is. The notion of *hiéroglyphes* is of capital importance here. Egyptologists, at the beginning, made the mistake of taking them literally and all efforts at interpretation came up against a blank wall. It was only when these drawings of material objects were read as *signs* that the meaning became clear.

Martin de Vere's painting may be interpreted as a figure of *Passage de Milan*, the canvas being divided into twelve squares as the novel consists of twelve chapters. While discussing this, his most recent work, with some visitors, de Vere launches into a disquisition on the development of his art which is of some importance. In reply to a question whose nature remains undisclosed, de Vere says that he had arrived at an impasse and goes on to show some of his old paintings by way of illustration. Here is how they appeared to Bénédicte, one of the company: "celui-ce on dirait un tissu, ou une fourrure, cet autre, un granit rouge rongé de lichens" (P. 111). The artist explains that since unlike animals, man must dig with the aid of tools, these carefully prepared "carrés de terrain" crumbled at a touch. From this somewhat cryptic utterance one deduces that the paintings employed actual materials, as in collages, for example, and were not simply representations. De Vere goes on to say that as a consequence of attending a lecture on the logical construction of music (which he found to be more evident to the eye, on the score, than to the ear) and of associating this with the wall-paintings of Saqqarah, he produced a canvas which was a synthesis of these experiences.

By using pure colour instead of the figures employed by the artist of Béni-Hassan, but retaining the notion of counterpoint he painted:

> "... un panneau sur fond très pale, nacré, où des petits carrés semblables à des notes grégoriennes s'organisent en quatre lignes sinueuses, la seconde renversant l'order longitudinal de la première, la troisième le vertical, et la quatrième les deux, tandis que les couleurs se contrarient, noir pour le blanc, vert pour le rouge, autour du pivot du gris, et inversent leur succession." (P. 113).

In other words the canvas may be read "bustrophedon" or as the ox ploughs, the mode of writing employed by scribes of hieroglyphic Hittite.

"Je multipliai les formes de base, j'inventai des lois de rencontre," de Vere explains, such was his desire to cement even further the diverse elements in his painting. Having up till then relied solely on visual relationships, he decided to introduce "un ensemble de signes" so that "une dimension toute nouvelle se découvrirait".

The ensemble in question was none other than the alphabet itself, the sign par excellence, and the effects of its introduction were indeed far-reaching.

The letters, meticulously drawn, *would* form words. "J'eus l'impression qu'en me servant de lettres j'avais donné la parole à une sorte de machine qui en savait plus long que moi. Ma peinture, la plus raisonnable de toutes, devenait hantée." One of the company makes the suggestion that "Il fallair faire aboutir ces mots embryonnaires, écrire..." But another voice intervenes, closing the discussion:

> "Mon cher, vous brulez les étapes; ayant découvert la puissance des signes, notre Martin remonte de la lettre au hiéroglyphe, et introduit dans ses tableaux des groupes de représentations d'objets." (P. 115).

This conversation is not easy to interpret, although we can pick out several themes which have continued to preoccupy Butor. There is the pursuit of the link between music, painting, and language, for example; the quest for ever tighter structure ("Je multipliai les formes de base") and the revelations which ensue from formal experiment ("J'inventai des lois de rencontre"). The use of the word *hiérglyphe* strikes an Egyptian note but its full significance lies in its connection with Proust's *impressions*, repositories of "une vérité nouvelle" and its reference to the "groupes de representations d'objets" in *Passage de Milan* itself. It almost seems as if Butor took up what had been for Proust failed experiences, and sought to bring them to fruition, to make them deliver up that new truth which they concealed. "Il s'agit bien d'une conversation entre Baudelaire et Magritte", Butor wrote, in the late sixties, of Magritte's painting, *L'art de la conversation*. In the same sense one might say that *Passage de Milan* is a conversation between Butor and Proust, who also had his "rue de l'Oiseau".

La Référence plastique: Les mots dans la peinture

Les mots dans la peinture[31] from which the remark on Baudelaire and Magritte is taken provides an interesting gloss on the conversation in de Vere's studio, and indeed on Butor's first novel generally. This book, which deals, as its title indicates, with the role played by words in painting, testifies not only to Butor's virtuosity, but also to the acuity of his observation and to the depth of the meditations which it engenders. Its interest is therefore great, but for the purpose of the present discussion it will be sufficient to refer to three particular instances of the use of words in painting out of the many which are dealt with in the book. These are Magritte's *La Clef des songes*, Pieter Bruegel's *Les proverbes néerlandais*, and the phenomenon known as a rebus.

Magritte's canvas consists of a rectangle divided into six compartments, rather like the panes of a window. Each of these houses a single object represented ultra-realistically with its name written in "copperplate" underneath. This would be entirely innocuous were it not for the fact that in each case the name appears to be totally unrelated to the object so faithfully represented above it. Thus, under what is indisputably an egg, we read "l'Acacia", while a black bowler hat is entitled "la Neige". Using another of Magritte's works as an aid to interpretation (a procedure which may usefully be applied to himself), Butor points out that the painter seeks to show the great gap which in fact separates the most "realistic" representation of the simplest object from the reality. In the gap between an egg and its image an acacia may flourish. Or again, as in the *clef des songes* proposed by Freud and exploited by Madison Avenue, our subconscious may frequently substitute one image for another too painful or too shocking to contemplate. Or yet again, the glaring disparity between the real acacia and the stereotype which its name evokes may allow it to assume the appearance of an egg in one's dreams. What is involved, according to Butor, is the interplay of four terms: the acacia, the image of the dream of the egg, the word acacia, the egg.

The interest of this analysis in reference to Martin de Vere's painting and to Butor's novel is at once manifest and difficult to express. The following series of questions seems preferable to flat statement, in the circumstances.

What light does Butor's discussion of *La Clef des songes* throw on the representation of objects in Martin de Vere's painting? in *Passage de Milan* itself? Can Magritte's canvas help us to interpret the dreams which haunt the apartment building? Do de Vere's painting and Butor's novel echo the disposition of *La clef des songes*?

In considering these matters we might note that Butor shares Magritte's attachment to windows (they figure prominently in *Passage de Milan*), which he finds particularly fascinating at the moment when they pass from transparency to reflection, the time of day which is "entre chien et loup", a favourite expression of his.

Writing of *La Clef des songes* Butor remarks that it resembles a window and goes on to say:

> "Que de fenêtres chez Magritte, et que de tableaux où elles mêlent le jour à la nuit! Celle-ci aussi associe à la pensée diurne des mots critiquant les peintures habituelles, la pensée nocturne des emblèmes critiquant les paroles habituelles, nous fait voir les étoiles en plein jour." (MP, 85).

This criticism of our knowledge of the real by means of the interplay of image, dream and language is closely related to Butor's own enterprise.

Pieter Bruegel's *Les proverbes néerlandais* consists of a series of scenes which illustrates various proverbs, establishing an elaborate interplay between them, which results in a multiplicity of meanings. For example, one scholar has proposed no less than four proverbs as "solutions" for the detail of a barefoot man kneeling before a house in flames. The painting has its origin in the spoken language and Butor's analysis of this facet of the work is most important.

> "Le tableau est entièrement bâti à partir du langage courant et doit réagir sur celui-ci. Toutes ces façons de parler habituelles, dont les mots se sont usés, y retrouvent leur étrangeté. D'autant plus que les proverbes ne sont pas isolés chacun dans un médaillon comme les saints dans les niches de leur retable, mais qu'ils se mêlent en scènes et groupes de scènes; c'est 'l'homme au couteau entre les dents' qui 'attache au chat le grelot'. C'est le même procédé d'invention que celui de Lewis Carrol (sic) dans *Alice*." (P. 70).

Butor's skill in handling different kinds of vernacular is amply demonstrated in *Passage de Milan*, where the tone of Madame Mogne, of her sons and of the various servants, to take some examples, is unerringly rendered. Like Bruegel's painting, the book is "bâti à partir du langage courant". The recurring phrase: "les vannes sont ouvertes" is a good example of this. It is applied to such diverse phenomena as the malicious probing of Frédéric Mogne's mother-in-law, Alexis Ralon's radio, and the music played at the party. "Les vannes" are sluice-gates and the expression derives its force from its connection with flooding waters. Thus the image of the Nile, with its life-giving flood, is evoked while the playing of "un blues fluvial" (P. 223) conjures up the delta of another great river, the Mississippi.

The reference to Lewis Carroll in the passage quoted above should also be noted, not only on linguistic grounds. The lay-out of *Passage de Milan* might be compared with a chess-board (Albérès has used the word *damier* in its regard), and then there are the frequent references to playing cards not to mention the network of over-lapping dreams, all features of Carroll's work. Carroll was also very interested in puzzles, of which the rebus is an example.

This device, which entails the enigmatic representation of a name or word by pictures suggesting its syllables, exercises a great attraction over Butor, for whom punning constitutes a verbal equivalent of the pictorial rebus and has the same effect of slowing down the deciphering process. In both cases, sonority is of capital importance, which means that they can only be "read" in the context of a single language. (This is not so for Bruegel's proverbs, in spite of their close link with popular speech.) The making or the deciphering of a rebus calls for a sensitivity to homonyms and homophones which makes one conscious that "Chaque mot est hanté par ceux qui lui ressemblent". The work of Raymond Roussel is built around this, as are many parlour games (notably the B.B.C. programme *My Word*) and crossword puzzles.[32] Butor has noted: "Chez les alchimistes: cabale phonétique". The connection between the rebus and the hieroglyph is also clear and it will be remembered that Martin de Vere "remonte de la lettre au hiéroglyphe et introduit dans ses tableaux des représentations d'objets." The introduction of the letters of the alphabet had already caused his work to become "hantée" as the syllables forming on the walls of his studio "s'attachaient à toutes les bribes de langues anciennes et modernes qui me restaient de mes études, pour brûler en pensers (sic) bizarres." (P. 115).

Butor refers elsewhere to the rebus in a different but most revealing context. This occurs in his essay "Le roman et la poésie". (R 2,Pp.7-27) Breton had quoted the description of a room by Dostoevsky in order to illustrate the hopelessly unpoetic quality of the novel and Butor takes up the same passage with the intention of turning the tables. Such descriptions are not isolated instances, Butor argues, but recur at nodal points in the novelist's work and when they are correctly placed within the context, not only of a single book, but of his complete opus they may be interpreted as:

> "... constantes de son imagination, dont je pourrai étudier le pourquoi, par là déchiffrer ce qu'il nous cache parfois, ce qui de lui était caché même à lui-même, grille ou *rébus* nous permettant de pénétrer dans son intimité la plus profonde." (R 2, 9).

Description thus interpreted is a long way from being a simple "défilé cinématographique des choses". The oblique rays cast by these observations, together with the texts quoted above, illuminate the many facets of the Realism of *Passage de Milan*.

The analysis of Magritte's painting exposes the complexity of the whole issue of realism in art and sets us thinking about the relationship between image and language. The commentary on Bruegel's proverbs points up the rich imagery which subtends popular speech although it generally passes unnoticed. The remarks on the rebus introduce another dimension to the discussion: sound, showing that it can be rendered pictorially and yet form words, and these same remarks lead subtly to the conclusion that the novel's images are images in the fullest sense: that they may at one and the same time be the artificial imitation of the external form of an object, and metaphor. This being so, the approach taken in this study, so far, to *Passage de Milan* may have been from the wrong angle. By persistently viewing it in relation to life rather than to language, the error common to novel-readers may have been perpetuated.

Like all other books it is only "words, words, words", as its characters are not real persons but "ensembles de mots". Like Bruegel's picture, Butor's novel is built to an unusual degree "à partir de la langue courante", but in contrast with writers like Carroll or Roussel, of whom the same might be said, the result is not fantasy, but Realism. Thus the numerous colloquialisms and sayings with which *Passage de Milan* is studded are revealed as so many "vers donnés" in Valéry's phrase, which not only provide the basis of the structure, but by their interplay, its very substance.

Such phrases as "entre chien et loup", "faire le pied de grue", "on ne les connaît ni d'Eve ni d'Adam", "les vannes sont ouvertes", the ambiguous title itself, are some examples. "Elle est si effacé" is the general verdict on Henriette Ledu - a literal description of her fate at the party, in the event. The instant before she is killed Henri Delétang mentally dismisses Angèle as "une petite grue", literally in English a *crane*, the French word for skull. Verbal play of this kind inevitably brings James Joyce to mind and it is significant that one of Butor's earliest essays was devoted to him. Together with the later "Esquisse d'un seuil pour Finnegan" it has a great deal to contribute to a discussion of the role of language in Butor's first novel.

"On a dit que le personnage principal d'*Ulysses*, c'était le langage, et il y a là quelque chose de profondément vrai." (R 1, 201). This comment of Butor's in 1948 might equally well be applied to his own first novel. The notion of language as sound is exemplified in both *Ulysses* and *Passage de Milan* by the role accorded to music in both books. Bloom's mind is haunted by *bel* *canto* and Stephen's by Gregorian chant. Probably few readers of *Ulysses* would recall unprompted that the beginning of the *Gloria in Excelsis* in Gregorian notation appears in the book. Butor, however, would not have missed such a detail and the fact that one of de Vere's paintings features "des petits carrés semblables à des notes grégoriennes" may be an oblique reference to this. Then too 15 Passage de Milan resounds for most of the night to the music emanating from the party, ranging from Strauss's *La vie rêvée* to the plaintive "Oh, Lawd, you made the night too long"; titles which typify Butor's unremitting attention to detail.

Butor remarks that "Il y avait des clés pour *Ulysses* dont la principale était le titre même." (R 1, 211), a statement which is no less true of *Passage de Milan* and on this score it is amusing to find Butor setting Charbonnier on the right track rather as Joyce did Stuart Gilbert. But it is important to note that for all its preoccupation with language and responsiveness to keys, *Ulysses*, for Butor, "avant d'être autre chose, est un roman" (R 1, 199), a comment which admirably expresses the intention of his own first four books when the novel seemed to him the most elastic of forms, and it is this which accounts for their "realism".

Developing the cliché

It is perhaps Butor's discussion of Joyce's treatment of *lieux communs* in *Finnegans Wake* that is of most interest to the study of *Passage de Milan*. Here is what he says:

> "La déformation que Joyce fait subir aux lieux communs nous en délivrent. Il est certes très agréable de devenir capable de lire à travers ces expressions rabâchées des histoires ahurissantes, mais ces histoires ahurissantes ne prennent tout leur sel que lorsqu'on a perçu la formule qui les sous-tend. Dans la vie quotidienne, c'est devant le lieu commun que nous nous trouverons, et Joyce nous aidera à le transformer, mais à l'intérieur de *Finnegans Wake* c'est souvent l'opération inverse qui se produira: je m'apercevrai en lisant une histoire bizarre que finalement c'est tel lieu commun qui en fait l'unité. La lecture de *Finnegans Wake* devient incomparablement plus aisée et plus fructueuse à partir du moment où l'on commence à reconnaître les lieux communs joyciens classiques." (R 1, 224).

Butor's activity corresponds closely, though not exactly, to his description of Joyce's method. *Passage de Milan* is a quest for deliverance from the *lieu commun* both literally and metaphorically.

The commonplace is not deformed, as in Joyce, nor are the incidents particularly bizarre, yet we are aware that "c'est tel lieu commun qui en fait l'unité" and hence that the reading is greatly assisted by recognition of "les lieux communs [butoriens] classiques". Instead of deformation Butor's technique might be described as *development of* *the cliché* but the end result is the same, a revelation of the mystery of language.

The expression "une petite grue" illustrates Butor's use of the *lieu commun*. *Une grue* is literally a crane but it also means "[une] femme de moeurs légères et vénales", the sense in which Henri applies it to Angèle. (P. 251). This second meaning derives from the expression "Faire le pied de grue" which Robert defines as "attendre longtemps sur ses jambes (comme une grue qui se tient sur une patte). Hence *grue* may mean prostitute "du fait des stations prolongées de la fille qui fait le pied de grue". An English equivalent of "Faire le pied de grue" would be "to dance attendance", which may be significant.

On page 224 of *Passage de Milan* we read how Louis is consumed with jealousy of Vincent and Gérard Mogne who have monopolised Angèle whom he desires. Resenting the confidence bordering on complacency which belonging to a large family confers on the brothers, he diagnoses their attitude to outsiders to be one of good-natured contempt. They are elaborately polite to each other: "Tandis que le reste du monde avait la permission de faire le pied de grue". In fact most of the young men at the party, but especially Louis, the Mogne brothers and Henri have danced attendance (literally and metaphorically) on Angèle, who is described as "une petite grue" at the end of the evening.

Bird-imagery plays a very important role in the novel, from the *milan* of the title to *Martin* de Vere's friend Pierre *Grivi*eux "payé pour griffonner des sons évocateurs.", and this *constante* of Butor's imagination adds another dimension to the expressions under discussion, indicating that they are not just casually dropped colloquialisms but are constitutive of the unity of the text. By the same token, the *milan*, who represents Horus, or "le soleil de la mort" is of the same tribe as the falcon, which may be trained to hunt the crane and it is the *passage de milan* and the shadow it casts which eclipses Angèle.

If it is felt that the foregoing analysis owes more to projection than to perception, the following remarks addressed by Butor to Charbonnier may be cited in its support:

> "Dans la littérature, nous prenons des mots de la vie quotidienne ..., nous les déchargeons d'un certain nombre de leurs significations, pour leur donner une signification précise, mais ce n'est qu'un premier mouvement, car la signification précise dont nous les chargeons va être faite pour retrouver la signification précise qu'ils avaient, qu'ils avaient non seulement avant d'entrer dans le livre, mais qu'ils avaient avant d'être oubliés par le lecteur.
>
> Il y a ici un jeu, pour moi tout à fait fascinant, un jeu très serré..."
>
> . . . .
>
> "J'organise ces mots de telle sorte qu'ils puissent mener à une prise de conscience". (Entretiens, 26).

This discussion is evidence of the success of his endeavours. However, the very conscious use of language in *Passage de Milan* in no way invalidates its realism, as Butor again makes clear when he says:

> "L'idéal, naturellement, ce serait d'arriver à ce que chacun de nous retrouve la totalité de l'empire des mots, que la totalité de l'empire des mots lui redevienne visible, qu'il puisse se promener à l'intérieur de cet empire redevenu lumineux, entièrement lumineux, et que l'empire des mots soit lumineux implique que la réalité toute entière soit lumineuse, que l'histoire entière soit devenue lumineuse, et que par conséquent, nous sachions ce que nous voulons." (Entretiens, 27).

But if this ideal is to be approached, the novelist must proceed in a highly selective manner:

> "Les significations conventionelles dont je viens de parler reposent sur les significations qui sont déjà là, et par conséquent ce n'est jamais n'importe quel mot ou n'importe quel objet, ou n'importe quel moment qui pourra être chargé de telle ou telle signification. Il faut trouver des objets, des moments, des détails, par lesquels la réalité se mette à parler, des mots, des objets, des personnages qui soient métaphores des autres, qui soient ce par quoi le reste devient visible, audible, connaissable, et en même temps désirable." (P. 27).

On reflection it becomes clear that finding "des objets, des moments, des détails par lesquels la réalité se mette à parler" describes a process in which novelists as apparently diverse as Balzac, Proust and Joyce, the trio of *intercesseurs* who have left their imprint on *Passage de*

Milan, participated and which Butor has described as follows:

> "Il faut se mettre à l'écoute de la réalité, il faut saisir le moment où la réalité commence à parler, où dans ce monde, dans ce discours muet qu'est le discours de notre vie quotidienne, dans ce monde muet de notre vie quotidienne, avec ses significations usées, il faut saisir les moments où, tiens, quelque chose que nous ne comprenions pas se met à se révéler à nous, quelque chose nous devient clair." (Charbonnier, Pp. 27-28).

This kind of "sudden spiritual manifestation" Joyce called an epiphany.[33]

While it may be true that what was for Joyce a mystical concept has become a literary device, nonetheless, Butor's understanding of epiphany seems to have kept or reanimated the full Joycean charge and it thus attains, in his hands, a vigour which a writer such as Katherine Mansfield, for example, was unable to achieve. This may well have something to do with certain similarities in the backgrounds of Joyce and Butor. Both came from devout Catholic families, both were educated by the Jesuits (an experience which, legend has it, leaves an ineradicable impression) and both became apostates. Since an epiphany is a spiritual manifestation, more particularly the manifestation of Christ to the Magi, these matters cannot be irrelevant to the concept. In Butor's case, as in Joyce's, there may be an attempt to create a literary substitute for the revelations of religion. The elements of linguistic experiment, myth, autobiography, symbolism and naturalism which contributed to Joyce's transcendental view of experience are certainly present in *Passage de Milan*.

Birds of Passage

The very title of Butor's first novel is an epiphany: the showing forth of Horus, the hawk-like sky god of whom each of the Pharoahs was held to be a re-incarnation, avenger of his father Osiris. In form, Horus resembles the "hawklike man", Daedalus, whose name Stephen bore, and whom he liked to imagine "soaring out of his captivity on osier'woven wings". (Daedalus was also the inventor of the Labyrinth, a theme which is taken up in Butor's second book, *L'Emploi du temps*.) The priest, Jean Ralon, is the only character in the novel who sees the *milan* of the title and he wonders if it might not be an aeroplane. This is consistent with his failure to recognise Osiris, whom, in his dreams, he meets in the Land of the Dead, and indicates that for all his studies in Egyptology he is no closer to the spirit of the old religions than to the spirit of Christianity.

It is Virginie, his mother, for all her superstition, or perhaps because of it, who has "ears to hear". She described at the dinner-table her emotion at the sight of "une grande troupe d'oiseaux ... qui poussaient de grands cris comme s'ils voulaient avertir au cours d'un passage ... [qui] tournoyaient et s'attardaient comme s'ils s'irritaient qu'on ne les comprît point ... ." (P. 56-57). Such flocks of birds often heralded the erratic arrivals and departures of her late husband Augustin, but now that he is dead she does not know how to interpret the sign and is filled with foreboding. Significantly, her son Jean cannot or will not help her: "il aurait bien trop peur que j'ajoutasse foi à ces sornettes millénaires." (P. 57). In the event, the birds warned of the departure of Louis, who is reminded of the ancient practice of augury by his aunt's words:

> "Le peuple cruel des oiseaux, le coucou, l'ibis, la mouette grise, avec des yeux ronds impénétrables au travers desquels des prêtres vêtus autrement voulaient voir de quoi demain serait fait."

Stephen Dedalus looked to the birds for augury too, seeking a sign that would confirm his own departure from Ireland. Leaning on his ashplant which reminds him of the augur's curved stick:

> "A sense of fear of the unknown moved in the heart of his weariness, a fear of symbols and portents, of the hawklike man whose name he bore soaring out of his captivity on osier-woven wings, of Thoth the god of writers, writing with a reed upon a tablet and bearing on his narrow ibis head the cusped moon."[34]

The correspondence between this passage and Butor's novel are at once perceptible and delicate, so that it is difficult to bring them out without being heavy-handed. Butor's name is bird-like, as Stephen's was, and he has endured school-boy jokes on this account just as Stephen did.

("'What is your name?' Stephen had answered: 'Stephen Dedalus.' Then Nasty Roche had said: 'What kind of a name is that?'") Then Egypt is invoked in the passage from Joyce, in the person of Thoth, who was customarily represented as an ibis and who appears under that guise in the sentences quoted from Butor. Another sphere of Joyce's influence is revealed by the comparison between the role played by birds in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in Butor's book.

Stephen's alter ego, tempter and enemy was called Vincent Heron, who had "a bird's face as well as a bird's name" (Portrait of the Artist, 109): "le peuple cruel des oiseaux". And in the vision which is the climax of the book, the wading girl on Dollymount strand appears to Stephen "like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful sea-bird."

> "Her long slender legs are delicate as a crane's while her bosom was a soft as a bird's, soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some dark-plumaged dove." (P. 186).

Toward the end of the Vertigues party, Louis thinks that Angèle is the only real being among the crowd of sagging marionettes. However, he pictures her body as being covered in feathers:

> "Votre corps est couvert de plumes, Angèle, juste au-dessous de votre peau, minces autour des yeau, amples sur votre ventre, et de toutes petites

> vagues sans se lasser qui lavent, chargées
> d'un peu de sable, et de sel et d'essence."
> (P. 193).

For Louis, Angèle has become a bird whose body is incessantly lapped by the caress of the waves, halcyon-like: "one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful sea-bird."

In contrast, Henri Delétang, the inverted puritan, is revolted by the hypocrisy he discerns in Angèle's "Yeux effrayés de colombe" (P. 251) when he finds Louis Lécuyer at his heels in the Vertigues apartment. (How easily shocked the cavalier of Clara Grumeaux turns out to be, incidentally, and what an indictment of the double moral standard his outrage implies, a good example of Butor's pointed criticism of the society which is epitomised by 15 Passage de Milan). In connection with the expression "une petite grue" it is worth noting that *grue* echoes the first syllable of Clara Grumeaux's surname, and the following little exchange which occurs at the beginning of the party, expertly conveying Madame Vertigue's chilly disapproval draws attention to this:[35]

> "Permettez-moi, chère madame, de vous présenter
> mademoiselle Clara Grumeaux...
> - Tout a fait enchantée. Voyons, Henri, vous
> connaissez Gísèle Petitpaté."
> Un bonjour bouché.
> "Et puis voici Denis Petitpaté, mademoiselle...
> - Grumeaux.
> J'ai si peu la mémoire des noms. Angèle, Henri
> t'a amené une de ses nouvelles camarades." (P. 86).

Pacing the corridor outside their bedrooms, Louis Lécuyer visualises the two Mogne brothers as vampires or monstrous birds of prey, whose victim is Angèle:

> "Dans leurs draps noirs ils pliaent et dépliaent leurs longues ailes; ils se nourrissaient de ses yeux dans leurs monstrueuses agapés ... Tout le sang d'Angèle passait à laver leurs bras pour leurs sombres fêtes,". (P. 244).

Meanwhile Alexis Ralon encounters, in his dreams, great birds:

> "[qui] chantaient avec des paroles; ils avaient un visage semblable à celui des hommes, et des bras séparés de leurs ailes avec des véritables mains, dont ils frappaient les paumes pour scander leurs strophes,". (P. 218).

A strongly romantic aura clings to these winged creatures as it does to many passages in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* In his anger at E. C.'s dallying with a young priest "looking at him out of dove's eyes" (P. 225), Stephen scorns her "batlike soul" (P. 226) and, his decision to leave taken, "the black arms of tall ships" beckon to him, "shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth" (P. 252). While these romantic overtones may be partly attributed, in both cases, to the strong lyrical urge which frequently impells first novels, Stuart Gilbert has shown the influence of Pater on the *Portrait*[36] and Butor has firmly stated to an interviewer that "il y a une continuité absolue entre les romantiques et la littérature contemporaine."[37]

Edmund Wilson's view that Symbolism was the twentieth century counterpart of the Romantic movement together with the acknowledged influence on Butor of Claudel and Mallarmé seems significant. Wilson wrote of Joyce that in *Ulysses* he had "exploited to-gether as no writer had thought to do before, the resources of Symbolism and of Naturalism".[38] Butor's *Passage de Milan* follows Joyce's example in this respect and his pervasive influence is delicately acknowledged by the novel called *Les Faubourgs de Trieste*, the work of one of Léonard's guests, which is circulating in 15 Passage de Milan.

One of the more important themes in Butor's first novel is that of Paternity, also a major preoccupation of Joyce. The relationships between father and son are explored in the Mogne family, the effect of a dead or absent father is seen on Louis and his cousins the priests, the father-daughter tie is exemplified by the Vertigues family and by Léonard and his illegitimate daughter Henriette. Curiously, Vincent Mogne thinks of the pale distraught Louis as Hamlet, at one point in the evening, and this play was closely bound up with the question of fatherhood in Joyce's mind, as the brilliant discussion in *Ulysses* attests.

Louis, like Hamlet and Stephen, is fatherless. Hamlet has lost his natural father and refuses to recognise his step-father. Stephen rejects Simon Dedalus as a father and turns rather to his name-sake Daedalus, "old father, old artificer". The recognition of Louis as a "Piteuse image de moi-même" by Samuel Léonard (a Jew) (P. 266) and his paternal solicitude for the young man carries strong overtones of Bloom's recognition of Stephen in the Hades episode of *Ulysses*. (The scene between Léonard and Louis takes place in the *cave*, incidentally.) It is paralleled by Felix Mogne's sudden rush of compassion for his father, on returning from the party:

> "'Comme ce dos est vieux', pense Felix, 'et qu'il est facile de lui faire accepter nos mensonges ... A-t-il tous les jours ces épaules voûtées, ces vêtements de cendre, cet air craintif?'" (P. 159).

Henri Delétang on the other hand plots his father's destruction or at least that of the family firm of Petitpaté, Delétang, Vertigues et Cie., "la belle raison sociale" which he hopes to crack open. He will never forgive his father for "la gale qu'il m'a léguée avec son nom", (P.202), he assures himself, and refers contemptuously to M. Petitpaté as "little pie senior",[39] a thoroughly Joycean twist.

Paternity of course is intimately bound up with questions of succession and inheritance, hence fraternity, a matter which Joyce for the most part ignored until *Finnegans Wake* but which figures largely in that book, as it does in

Passage de Milan. It is exemplified in the three Mogne brothers, who are bound by ties of loyalty, even when rivals, unlike the Ralon family where Jean and Alexis, though priests, are miles apart from each other and from their mother. Gérard saves Vincent from discovery in Ahmed's bed, and cedes Angèle to his elder brother at the party, though not without presenting a constant challenge. Félix, the youngest brother, watches, and his account is instructive of how Butor builds up a theme.

> "A chaque nouveau disque, Mogne deux la cherche, mais si númerο un arrive, s'efface. Il sait qu'il ne peut en garder l'exclusivité; si elle doit se frotti-frotter à d'autres, autant que ça reste dans la famille. Marrant le gars, tout sage, tout tranquille, et de temps en temps on ne sait plus ce qui lui passe par la tête; ce n'est pas comme le Prince de Galles, au poil, mais siphonné, on est prévenu. Le droit d'aînesse comme chez les anciens rois et les juifs de la Bible. Pieux, comme pius Aeneas, ce n'est pas lui qui ferait le coup de lentilles, d'ailleurs ce serait plutôt lui qui aurait la tête d'Esaü; c'est comme si ça lui faisait plaisir de les voir ensemble. Quant aux autres demoiselles, ces messieurs les laissent tomber d'un plein accord, sauf Anne de Bretagne et la jeune ensorceleuse, à peine de ci de là une politesse." (Pp. 149-150).

There are several important things to be noted about this snatch of interior monologue. Firstly there is the general tone which is very convincingly that of a French schoolboy of Félix's age and background, with its mixture of slang and pedantry. Then there are the references to

Royal families (*dauphin, Prince de Galles, Anne de Bretagne*) which recall the "royalty" of the pack of cards, represented in de Vere's painting, and also the Egyptian theme. The legitimacy of heirs is of prime importance in noble families and the reference to the story of Jacob and Esau brings this out. The slang expression "au poil" recalls the subterfuge used by Jacob's mother to obtain for him the inheritance which was rightfully Esau's and its use here provides an excellent example of Butor's treatment of the *lieu commun*. That Félix should describe his brother as "au poil" is a perfectly "realistic" detail yet the phrase is resonant with a deeper reality. Moreover, ten pages further on, Félix is again linked with the Jacob/Esau story when he visits his grandfather in his bedroom. The old man mistakes him initially for his own son Frédéric: "' - Donne-moi ta main ... Oui tu es déjà presque un homme, on pourrait confondre ta main et la sienne.'" (P. 160).

The family as the basic unit of society is under scrutiny throughout *Passage de Milan* and the conclusion seems to be that it is more intimately concerned with the protection of property than with the bonds of love, either eros or agape. The strictures on illegitimacy, the law of primogeniture, the bartering of daughters to achieve advantageous marriages, are all corollaries of this fact but whereas under the old dispensation, Kings and men such as

Aeneas and Jacob were held to be the Elect of God and hence the maintenance of the purity of the line was invested with a higher significance, the ludicrously named dynasties of Delétang, Petitpaté and Vertigues are distinguished only by their money.

It should be noted however that the Mogne family is treated sympathetically, in general, and, perhaps because they have no wealth, they have managed to establish a "civilisation de famille" which extends even to the grandparents whom they harbour. Even among them, however, there is rivalry between the brothers and a tendency to regard the girls as marriage fodder: "tu es immariable", Lucie Mogne cries in exasperation to one of her daughters. Furthermore, as in all families, the sons must inevitably supplant the father. The word *smala* is used twice of the Mogne family in the course of the book. It means literally, the retinue of an Arab chieftain, and by extension, a large family. Frédéric Mogne mentally applies it to his brood as he wearily returns from work, and it is used again at the end of the evening when his children are leaving the party: Vincent "pousse la smala comme un troupeau" (P. 217), exercising his "droit d'aînesse"; assuming the role of his father.

In addition to its brilliant and profound treatment of language, *Passage de Milan* has a strongly visual quality which was touched on in the course of the discussion of food in the novel, and which now requires some further comment. This aspect of the book is closely connected with the question of the narrator, who remains unidentified. Albérès has remarked that the art of Butor's first novel is that of the *metteur-en-scene*, and *Passage de Milan* has certain cinematographic overtones which are undeniable. The style of *Ulysses* too owes a good deal to the motion-picture, and Joyce was sufficiently interested in films to try unsuccessfully to establish the first cinema in Ireland. In any case, whether influenced directly by film techniques, or indirectly, through Joyce's use of them, the success of *Passage de Milan* owes a lot to skillful *montage*.

Such devices as découpage, fondu enchainé, travelling and crossing-up are frequently encountered in the novel. The description of the slice of mortadella sausage is quite clearly a close-up, as is the following "shot" of Clara Grumeaux: "Superbes épaules; visage étriqué dans son auréole blonde artificiel à la star; mains rapides mais imprécises." (P. 83). The reverie of Frédéric Mogne as he waits for his dinner illustrates both travelling and fondu enchainé:

> "Le regard de Frédéric Mogne effleure une pervenche, sur le papier peint du salon défraîchi, puis de grands pétales violets, caresse un petit cadre de bois noir, examine la vitre sans la traverser, sa poussière, ses défauts, un petit oeil dans la verre, s'y attarde, se laisse prendre à son piège, et s'y enfonce.
>
> A droite la maison, à gauche la charrette dans la grange, dans le fond l'âne et le paysages de vignes; la petite ligne qu'on devine, c'est le clocher de l'église ou il fut baptisé." (P. 40).

This analogy with the technique of the cinema, in addition to those already drawn between *Passage de Milan* and the works of Balzac, Joyce and Proust might seem, perhaps, to detract from the novel's originality. Such a conclusion would be simplistic, however. All artists are indebted to other artists, a fact about which Malraux has made some pointed observations in *Les Voix du silence*; remarks which are most appropriate to the discussion of a first novel:

> "Il est révélateur que pas une mémoire de grande artiste ne retienne une vocation née d'autre chose que de l'émotion ressentie devant une oeuvre: représentation théatrale, lecture d'un poème ou d'un roman pour les écrivains; audition pour les musiciens; contemplation d'un tableau pour les peintres. L'homme bouleversé par un spectacle ou un drame, et soudain obsédé par la volonté de l'exprimer et y parvenant, on ne le rencontre jamais. 'Et moi aussi je serai peintre!' pourrait être l'expression rageuse de toutes les vocations ... Ce qui fait l'artiste, c'est d'avoir été dans l'adolescence plus profondément atteint par la découverte des oeuvres d'art que par celle des choses qu'elles représentent, et peut-être celle des choses tout court."[40]

And that is the reason, Malraux concludes later on, why every artist's career begins with the pastiche (P. 310). This term might seem a little strong, but if it is accepted, for the sake of argument, the ambivalent nature of this initial pastiche must be emphasised. It is at once an effort at absorption and expurgation (at least in the case of the great artist) and on its success depends the emergence of his mature works. That is the essential difference between such pastiche and the activity of those "qui prennent les livres célèbres d'autrefois et maquillent leurs rides."

Thus if Pater and Newman are discernible in the background of *Portrait of the Artist*, *Ulysses* could not have been written if the *Portrait* had not first been produced. *Passage de Milan* fulfills the same function, to some extent, where Butor is concerned, a fact which adds another gloss to the notion that this first novel is the matrice of his *oeuvre*. In any case, when the writer reads, as Butor has observed, "La lecture d'un livre va lui donner, comme on dit, des idées." (Entretiens, 70). One feels that his own use of the ideas thus obtained is extremely conscious, even in his first book. The analogies that may be drawn between *Passage de Milan* and the work of other artists are intrinsically interesting and serve to elucidate the novel, but they do not conflict with its *quid-*

ditas as a work of art, since, in the final analysis, all art is synthesis.

In spite of its great richness and originality, however, the first edition of *Passage de Milan* reputedly sold only 200 copies. It seems that this may have been less because of its newness than because of the mistaken assumption that the book offered a relatively straight-forward account of a night in a Paris apartment building. But then, *Ulysses* too, was initially taken to be an account of a day in the life of a Dubliner, until Joyce was obliged to lead his public to the Homeric parallel; an index of the ambiguity of realism and of the complexity of the process which results in the work of art, combining, as it does, tradition and novelty in such a subtle blend, that we can only sometimes appreciate the one or the other when the artist shows us the way.

[1] Georges Charbonnier, "L'Immeuble et la fête," *Entretiens avec Michel Butor* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 48.

[2] Michel Butor, *Passage de Milan* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1954; rpt. Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1970). References in the text are to the Editions de Minuit edition.

[3] This is also the opinion of Georges Raillard, see "Référence plastique et discours littéraire chez Michel Butor," *Nouveau Roman: hier aujourd'hui*, Vol. 2, *Pratiques*, pp. 255-278. Raillard says: "Je crois en effet que ce livre [*Passage de Milan*] est la réserve et la matrice de tous ceux qui l'ont suivi."

[4] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in *The Essential James Joyce*, ed. Harry Levin (1948; rpt. Penguin Books, 1967) p. 247. References to the *Portrait* in the text are to this edition.

[5] Michel Carrouges, "Michel Butor, *Le Passage de Milan*," *Le Monde Nouveau*, No. 82, octobre 1954, pp. 74-77. The passage quoted appears on page 75.

[6] John Sturrock, *The French New Novel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) does not agree. In his view, the entire book takes place in the mind of l'Abbe Jean Ralon, whose meditations open *Passage de Milan* and who records seeing the *milan* of the title on page 11.

[7] For a full treatment of this aspect of Butor's work, see Lucien Dällenbach, *Le Livre et ses miroirs dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Michel Butor*, Archives des lettres modernes, 1972(3), (VIII) No. 135 (Paris: Minard, 1972).

[8] This mention of an *emploi du temps* coupled with the reference to Alexis Ralon's class schedule earlier in the novel could be interpreted as an advance notice of the themes of *L'Emploi du temps* and *Degrés*, another instance, perhaps, of *Passage de Milan*'s role of matrice in Butor's *oeuvre*.

[9] See Georges Raillard, *Butor*, La Bibliotheque Ideale, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 20.

[10] W. H. Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage, Notes on the Detective Story by an Addict," Harper's, May 1948, pp. 406-412.

[11] See *Sanctuaire*, Préface d'André Malraux; traduit de l'anglais par R. Raimbault et Henri Delgove (Paris: Gallimard, 1933).

[12] Ludovic Janvier, *Une Parole Exigeante: Le Nouveau roman* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964), p. 49.

[13] R.-M. Albérès, *Métamorphoses du roman* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1966), pp. 150-151.

[14] Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, *La Comédie Humaine*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1952).

[15] Jennifer Walters, "Symbolism in Passage de Milan," *The French Review*, January 1969, pp. 223-232, p. 223.

[16] Balzac, Avant-propos à *La Comédie Humaine*, 1842, quoted by Butor in "Philosophie de l'Ameublement," *Répertoire 2*, pp. 51-60, p. 55.

[17] Quoted by Butor, op. cit., p. 57.

[18] Butor himself has drawn attention to this:

> "Le titre même *Passage de Milan*, qui est un jeu de mots, désigne aussi à la fois l'adresse de l'immeuble dans lequel on se trouve ... Et c'est aussi le passage de l'oiseau, le milan, qui en Egypte, dans L'Egypte antique, était le dieu Horus." (Entretiens, 51).

The title may also refer to François Mauriac's play *Passage du Malin*, the title of which it so closely resembles. The play was produced in 1947, so it is possible that Butor would have seen it, and in the light of his Catholic upbringing and his desire to break away from the ties of his family, certain observations made by Emilie, the heroine, towards the end, may be significant:

> "Ceux qui m'adorent, voilà mes seuls adversaires:
> Tous ces êtres qui se nourrissent de ma substance...
> Comprenez-vous ce que cela signifie que de leur
> être de nouveau livrée? Il va falloir recomposer
> mes pensées, mes croyances, mes goûts, et jusqu'aux
> traits de ma figure selon le modèle qu'ils exigent
> de moi."

François Mauriac, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome IX (Paris: Grasset, 1952), p. 358.

[19] Michel Butor, "Egypte," *Le Génie du lieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1958), p. 142.

[20] Roland Barthes, "L'Activité Structuraliste," *Essais Critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 214.

[21] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage*, (Paris: Plon, 1962) p. 36.

[22] Ibid., p. 34.

[23] Yvan Simonis, *Claude Lévi-Strauss ou la passion de l'inceste*, Coll. Recherches Economiques et Sociales (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968) p. 318.

[24] Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, Coll. 10/18 (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1962) p. 44. Quoted by Simonis, p. 15.

[25] Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, p. 43, see Simonis, p. 35.

[26] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, Notice notes et éclaircissements de M. Jacques Crépet (Paris: Louis Conard, 1932), p. 457.

[27] R.-M. Albérès, "Réalisme et ésotérisme: Passage de Milan (1954)," *Michel Butor*, Deuxième édition, revue et augmentée, Classiques du XXe siècle (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1964) pp. 12-23. References are to pages 17 and 15.

[28] Michel Butor, "Joyce et le roman moderne," *L'Arc* 36 (1968), dedicated to Joyce. P. 4.

[29] André Breton, *Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme,* quoted by Butor, "Le roman et la poésie," Répertoire 2, p. 12.

[30] Proust, *Le temps retrouvé, A la recherche du temps perdu,* III, Texte établi et présenté par Pierre Clarac et André Ferré (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 885.

[31] Michel Butor, *Les Mots dans la peinture*, Les Sentiers de la création (Genève: Albert Skira, 1969).

[32] The connection between the crossword puzzle and (a) the grid on which *Passage de Milan* is constructed, and (b) a time-table should be noted. The Mogne brothers leave a crossword partially completed when they leave for the party. See p. 89: "La grille des mots croisés reste à demi-remplie."

[33] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. from the Manuscript in Harvard College Library by Theodore Spencer (1944: rpt. New Directions Paperbook: New York, 1963), p. 211:

> "By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself."

[34] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* p. 229.

[35] The fact that Madame Vertigues sees nothing wrong with the ludicrous name of *Petitpaté* because in her eyes it represents people who are socially acceptable, is ironic.

[36] See Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study,* (1930; rpt. London: Peregrine Books, 1969) pp. 84-86.

[37] F. C. St. Aubyn,"Entretien avec Michel Butor," *French Review*, XXXVI, 1 October 1962, 12-22, p. 15.

[38] Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (1931: rpt. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 204.

[39] The importance of names in Butor's work is nowhere more evident than in *Passage de Milan*. See Georges Raillard's comments in "Réference plastique et discours littéraire chèz Michel Butor." That this emphasis on names is a legacy from Proust, Butor himself has acknowledged:

> "Décisif, il me semble, a été pour moi le rôle qu'il fait jouer aux 'noms' et aussi à la peinture et a la musique." ("Reconnaissance", Le Figaro Littéraire, 21-27 novembre 1963).

The name Delétang may be read De l'étang and when Henri refers to M. Petitpaté as "little pie senior" there is a double pun, since *pie* in French means magpie, which fits in very will with the bird-imagery.

[40] André Malraux, "La Création artistique," *Les Voix du silence*, La Galérie de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 279.

The Music of Time

Passing Time:

"Je fais très attention au titre; le titre est un mot qui est en plus gros que tous les autres mots du livre, c'est comme si ce mot était répété 100 fois ou 1000 fois. Donc, je choisis les titres soigneusement."[1] In the light of this statement, the title of Butor's second novel, *L'Emploi du temps*[2] assumes an ambiguity comparable to that of *Passage de Milan* although at first sight it would seem to be more flat and banal. What does it mean? The time-table? The use of time? The work of time? Less literally the notion of an alibi may be implied. On the other hand, if the word *temps* is narrowly interpreted as "tense", *L'Emploi du temps* may refer wryly to the particular narrative problems which face the novelist. I believe that the title carries all these connotations. But in any case, it is clear that *time* is central to this book and Butor himself has said that in writing it he was particularly concerned with the problem of rendering the passing of time.[3] The problem of passage, posed in his first novel (and referred to, significantly, in the title), is given fuller treatment in his second, he says, and the title, *L'Emploi du temps*, occupies a place in a progression which mirrors that of the novel itself in the progression of his *oeuvre. (Entretiens,* 12).

Appropriately enough, the book takes the form of a journal, kept by Jacques Revel, a young Frenchman, during the year he spends in the quintessentially grim North of England city of Bleston, whose squalor, mud and rain seem the manifestations of an inimical *genius loci*. Employed as a clerk by the firm of Matthews and Sons, Revel makes a few ill-assorted friends in the course of his year: the black immigrant worker, Horace Buck, a fellow clerk, James Jenkins, a detective story writer, George William Burton and his wife, Harriet, and another Frenchman, Lucien Blaise, who is also spending a year in Bleston for the purpose apparently of learning the hotel business, although why he should come to such a city for such a purpose is rather obscure.

Revel also falls half-heartedly and consecutively in love with each of two sisters, Ann and Rose Bailey, and loses both of them, Ann to James Jenkins and Rose to Lucien. Burton, the author of a detective story called *Le Meurtre de Bleston* under the pseudonym of J. C. Hamilton, is the victim of a curious hit-and-run motor accident which may or may not have been an attempt on his life. He recovers, but Revel reproaches himself bitterly with having revealed that Burton and Hamilton were the same person, thus exposing his friend to danger. For various reasons he suspects James Jenkins of being the delinquent driver and in an effort to verify his suspicions, embarks on some amateur detective work, the results of which are inconclusive. The engagements of the Bailey girls are duly announced and celebrated and Lucien Blaise returns to France. Revel follows eventually, having failed not only as a lover and a detective, but even as a diarist, since the journal, begun when seven months of his stay had already elapsed, remains incomplete, the increasingly pressing need to record current events preventing him from ever fully catching up on the backlog from October to May. He has succeeded in doing only one thing, and it is no mean achievement: he has survived.

Summarised thus, it is clear that *L'Emploi du temps* contains much that would not be out of place in a detective story laced with mild romantic interest, of the kind popularised by the now defunct green Penguin. This is acknowledged in the novel by the fact that Revel reads *Le Meurtre de Bleston* in this very edition, whose format is described in some detail. Burton's book proves very useful to Revel at the outset; he uses it as a guide to Bleston. But it is made clear that in the long run it is inadequate, that he must go beyond it to write his own book, which *Le Meurtre de Bleston* may prefigure, but which it cannot replace. This is a pointer to us that we must go beyond the detective story element in *L'Emploi du temps* in order to appreciate its full significance; but to go beyond implies the absorption that comes of understanding and is very different from ignoring this element, or even from dismissing it lightly. The detective story intrigue in *L'Emploi du temps* serves the same purpose in exploring its structure as does *Le Meurtre de Bleston* in Jacques Revel's exploration of that city. It provides a means of access.

As the whole cannot be contained in one of its parts, *L'Emploi du temps* cannot be fitted into the "detective-story-laced with romantic interest" mould, but it bears just sufficient resemblance to its shape to arouse the reader's hopes; rather in the way in which one tries to fit a work into a particular space in a crossword. It is a question of what Gombrich has called "mental set", induced by familiarity with a stereotype, in this case detective fiction. We persist in our reading of *L'Emploi du temps* (for the first time only, of course) because we hope that our attention will ultimately be rewarded in the manner traditional to the detective story; that some revelation, some explanation will retrospectively confer meaning on what often appears to be an accumulation of trivia. One dare not skip, lest important clues be missed, thus one is induced to submit to the frequently tedious yoke of Jacques Revel's diary and to *attend* to every tortuous sentence of it. Only at the end of the book, when it becomes clear that no "explanation" is forthcoming, does the perceptive reader realise that he has been "had", to put it bluntly. He has been induced to live Jacques Revel's experience with him, to lend him his own *durée*, to *endure* passing time in the fullest sense of the word. There is no novel of which it could more truly be said that it "se gonfle et se nourrit avec le temps de ses lecteurs."[4]

According to Sartre, this is the criterion of a successful novel and it can only happen if the novelist "esquisse un temps semblable au mien, òu l'avenir n'est pas fait."[5] However, when this requirement is juxtaposed with the fact that "les événements se produisent dans un sens et nous les racontons en sens inverse",[6] a paradox results which constitutes one of the most complex problems confronting the novelist, that is how to "respecter dans le passé le présent qu'il fut."[7] Jean Pouillon concludes that if he is to preserve the equivocal nature of the present, the writer must resort to subterfuge. He must hide from the reader that they are both travelling along the same course *in opposite directions*. To narrate implies that the future, relative to what is being narrated, is known to the narrator. The problem is not to allow this knowledge to impinge on events which took place before it could have been acquired and this has been tackled with varying success by different novelists. The fact remains, however, that knowledge, once acquired, cannot be expunged and therefore, however scrupulously the writer tries to maintain a present which is free of the influence of future developments already known to him, he can never be entirely successful. This difficulty inheres in narration, as Roquentin points out in *La Nausée*:

> "On a l'air de débuter par le commencement: 'C'était par un beau soir de l'automne de 1922. J'étais clerc de notaire à Marommes.' Et en réalité c'est par la fin qu'on a commencé. Elle est là, invisible et présente, c'est elle qui donne à ces quelques mots la pompe et la valeur d'un commencement." (P. 62)

That is the difference between *le récit* and life. In narrative the uncertainty of the future can only be maintained by illusion; in life, it is real.

The demand made on the novelist, therefore, is this: " ... de neutraliser son savoir ... d'atteindre à la vérité par la mauvaise foi", and this is what Butor refuses to do in *L'Emploi du temps*, by showing explicitly "ce mouvement d'ordinaire secret par lequel le romancier remonte le cours que le lecteur descend."[8] Jacques Revel begins writing in May about the previous September. His object is to try to find out how he has arrived at the point where he now stands. There is no question of recovering a past which is free from the influence of subsequent events. On the contrary, it is in the determinate sense, which links it causally to the present, that the past is being sought. Revel is trying to reconstitute his *emploi du temps*. The issue is not uncertainty about the future but uncertainty about the past, the past which is progressively brought to light, and modified, by current events as well as by the application of hindsight. The present irrupts in the narrative because it awakens the memory of other "jours harmoniques" and thereby:

> " ... transforme l'apparence du passé, et cette accession de certaines régions à la lumière généralement s'accompagne de l'obscurcissement d'autres jadis éclairées qui deviennent étrangères et muettes jusqu'à ce que le temps ayant passé, d'autres échos viennent les réveiller." (P. 432).

Butor not only accepts that hindsight imposes a pattern on past episodes in our lives (the pattern is not necessarily false, it just wasn't apparent while we were living them), but he makes it the basic premise of his book. Thus Roquentin's complaint that:

> " ... nous avons le sentiment que le héros a vécu tous les détails de cette nuit comme des annonciations, comme des promesses, ou même qu'il vivait seulement ceux qui étaient des promesses, aveugle et sourd pour tout ce qui n'annonçait pas l'aventure. Nous oublions que l'avenir n'était pas encore là; le type se promenait dans une nuit *sans présages*, qui lui offrait pêle-mêle ses richesses monotones et il ne choisissait pas." (P. 62),

is countered. Because *L'Emploi du temps* takes the form of a "*récit à contre-courant*",[9] the future *is* already there, imposing a selective pattern on the past, which seems to abound with omens and portents. The fact that the second chapter of the novel is called simply "Présages" could be interpreted as a subtle acknowledgment of Roquentin's challenge.

Now the "récit à contre courant" par excellence is the detective story. The detective starts with the crime and works backwards, trying to re-establish the events which led up to it, and as he looks back, certain things begin to appear significant, in the light of what has happened and *is* happening in the course of his investigation. *Présages* in fact might be interpreted as clues; their value is that they lead to an explanation. "Mais le but du véritable roman policier est de disparaître en fumée, dans l'apothéose de l'explication enfin trouvée par le détective",[10] as Pouillon remarks. In this sense, there is a détective story hidden in every traditional novel and this is what Butor is trying to show us. *L'Emploi du temps* is neither a detective story nor a traditional novel; therefore there is no explanation, hence it cannot go up in smoke, cannot be wiped out by its own success. A satisfactory *dénouement* obliterates the effort which led up to it in the reader's mind. But if there is no such *dénouement* the effort stands, ambiguous and problematical, for the reader to interpret as he will. He is left with it on his hands, so to speak; "Cette matière épaisse que je brasse ... c'est mon temps."[11] Butor wished to convey the passing of time in *L'Emploi du temps*; Revel's failure is a necessary condition of his success.

The brilliant technique with which Butor uses the detective story in the elaboration of his second novel must be seen as the formal expression of an underlying *métaphysique*. *L'Emploi du temps* is not intended to be a post facto account of a young Frenchman's year in an industrial city in the North of England, as if that city were a reality which already existed, intact and independent of Revel and which he would get to know, and describe from the outside. "Michel Butor ne décrit pas la ville de Manchester: il montre les efforts de son personnage, Jacques Revel, pour découvrir la ville".[12] *L'Emploi du temps is* that effort, in fact, and as such it is a paradigm of our daily attempt to do likewise in our individual situations. Revel's endeavour to impose an explanation like a grill is bound to fail, for the positivism of the nineteenth century, though it dies hard, is a totally inadequate instrument with which to tackle today's world, and its reflection, the explicative technique of the traditional novel, will therefore no longer do either. As Jacques Revel discovers, explanations arrived at by hindsight are useless even when they are not false, because there is no still point in a turning world: we are constantly mobile, constantly in flux. As Butor wrote of Michel Leiris's autobiography, *L'Age d'Homme:*

> " ... le 'je' lorsqu'il termine l'entreprise n'en est plus au même point que lorsqu'il l'avait commencée, et donc il voit les mêmes événements d'une façon différente; il a autre chose à en dire;" (R 1, 266)

That is the irony of Revel's experience. The *roman policier* of our existence cannot be resolved because there is no bottom line but death. That does not mean that we should abandon all attempts to make sense out of our lives; quite the contrary, for the reward lies not in a pat explanation, but in the effort itself, the effort to organise our experience, which transforms us, and ergo, the world.

Frequently, in our search for meaning, we are inclined to explain whole periods of our lives away, to make them disappear in a puff of smoke, like the detective story. But that is false to the density and opacity of the experience; it does away with our *durée*. The effect created by *L'Emploi du temps* is the reverse, and the contribution of the detective story intrigue to this is highly important. Butor himself has written:

> "Il y a certes un roman naïf et une consommation naïve du roman, comme délassement ou divertissement, ce qui permet de passer une heure ou deux, de'tuer le temps', et toutes les grandes oeuvres, les plus savantes, les plus ambitieuses, les plus austères, sont nécessairement en communication avec le contenu de cette énorme rêverie, de cette mythologie diffuse, de cet innombrable commerce,

> mais elles jouent aussi un rôle tout autre et absolument décisif: elles transforment la façon dont nous voyons et racontons le monde, et par conséquent transforment le monde." (R 2, 90)

It is the "roman naif" and the related "consommation naïve du roman" that Roquentin calls into question in *La Nausée*. *L'Emploi du temps* represents a further stage in the *autocritique* of the genre. It is Roquentin's contention that narration, no less than reading, may serve to kill time, to use that phrase in all its ambiguity. That would seem to be one of Roquentin's main objections to it and *L'Emploi du temps* is an attempt to deal with this difficulty. The two novels are thus connected at a profound level, a link which is reinforced by numerous similarities, which a more detailed comparison will reveal.

Bleston: Bouville Revisited?

In the first place, the relationship between Butor and Revel and between Bleston and Manchester is strongly reminiscent of the Sartre/Roquentin, Bouville/Le Havre nexus which supports *La Nausée*. Furthermore, the latter is Roquentin's diary, just as *L'Emploi du temps* is Revel's. Their basic motive for keeping such a record is the same, although Roquentin's confident expression of it is in sharp contrast with Revel's increasing sense of futility: "Tenir un journal pour y voir clair." (Roquentin, 9); "A quoi bon maintenant continuer cet immense, cet absurde effort pour y voir clair qui ne m'a servi qu'à mieux me perdre?" (Revel, 277)

Both men feel themselves to be outsiders in an ambiance which the one finds contemptible and unsympathetic, the other downright inimical, and in this they reflect an actual malaise experienced by their creators. Butor's feeling of isolation in Manchester is documented and Sartre's sojourn in Le Havre was bound to have something of exile in it too, when one considers the degree to which intellectual and artistic life in France are concentrated in the capital, not to mention the fact that the whole bourgeois way of life, against which Sartre was in revolt, is traditionally most strongly represented in provincial towns. These similarities seem both too close and too numerous to attribute to chance; furthermore, the list is not an exhaustive one.

Both novels describe one man's attempt to come to grips with reality (bearing in mind the ambiguity which attaches to that word) and both are concerned with the role that writing, or more broadly, *le récit*, has to play in that attempt. This concern with *le récit* is not incidental, in either case. It is necessary to the enterprise, because, as Roquentin remarks:

> " ... un homme c'est toujours un conteur d'histoires, il vit entouré de ses histoires et des histoires d'autrui, il voit tout ce qui lui arrive à travers elles; et il cherche à vivre sa vie comme s'il la racontait." (*La Nausée*, 60)

Or as Butor has put it:

> " ... le récit est un phénomène qui dépasse considérablement le domaine de la littérature; il est un des constituants essentiels de notre appréhension de la réalité. ...
>
> Ceci n'est pas seulement vrai des hommes, mais des choses mêmes, des lieux, par exemple, où je ne suis pas allé mais que l'on m'a décrits." (R 1, 7)

According to Roquentin, *le récit* falsifies reality by imposing a spurious order on the amorphous monotony of living. It is an attempt to deny contingency, to contradict what one critic has called Roquentin's Law of Matter: "Tout existant naît sans raison, se prolonge par faiblesse et meurt par rencontre."[13] Butor too admits the distorting effect of *le récit*: "Le récit nous donne le monde, mais il nous donne fatalement un monde faux." (R 2, 88). However, this is not, in his view, because it discloses meaning where there is none, but because as a system, it is not sufficiently inclusive. It is an oversimplification of the complexity of our relations with the world and every new development in those relations reveals its inadequacy. This is as true of our discourse to ourselves as it is of our discourse to other people; hence Jacques Revel's continuous reassessment of the events recorded in his diary. "Que de fantômes ainsi entre nous et le monde, entre nous et les autres, entre nous-mêmes et nous!" (R 2, 89)

Apart from its perpetual inadequacy, *le récit* suffers from another defect: it may not always be true. Both Roquentin and Revel come up against this difficulty in their efforts to reconstitute the past, Revel his own, Roquentin that of le Marquis de Rollebon, on whom he is writing a historical work. Although in possession of valuable documentation in the form of the marquis's letters, Roquentin cannot be sure that M. de Rollebon was telling the truth when he wrote them, especially since it is known that he enjoyed deliberate mystification on another occasion. Roquentin comes to realise that, however solidly they are grounded in evidence, his hypotheses about the marquis can never be conclusively proven. They are simply "une manière d'unifier mes connaissances" (P. 26) and he sometimes has the impression that he is writing a work of pure imagination.[14]

"Une manière d'unifier mes connaissances"might be a definition of Butor's conception of *le récit*. Unlike Roquentin, however, he does not see anything wrong with this, provided that the process is dynamic and not static; that our working hypotheses continually change and develop in direct relation to the widening and deepening of our knowledge.

Roquentin eventually realises that he would like to give full rein to his imagination in his treatment of M. de Rollebon, but then, he concludes regretfully, it would cease to be a historical work. "Seulement, si c'était pour en venir là, il fallait plutôt que j'écrive un roman sur le marquis de Rollebon." (P. 87). This is precisely the distinction that Butor makes between the *récit véridique* and the novel. The one can be verified from external sources, the other cannot, must be entirely self-sufficient. But whereas Roquentin even doubts the validity of the *récit véridique*, declaring the expression "*une histoire vraie*" to be a contradiction in terms, Butor points out that "le même mot français 'histoire' désigne à la fois le mensonge et la vérité ... nous savons bien que le Père Goriot n'a pas existé de la même façon que Napoléon Bonaparte." (R 2, 89). We can call on no outside evidence regarding le Père Goriot and this would remain the case even if a real Père Goriot were discovered to have existed, since Balzac's declared intention was to write a *novel*. Note, however, that Butor does not deny the existence of Le Père Goriot, but simply says that he exists in another mode than Napoleon. Roquentin feels that he cannot allow his imagination any latitude in the case of M. de Rollebon because his declared intention had been to write a historical work. The novel which he decides to write at the end of *La Nausée* is a substitute for this work, which he had described as "la seule justification de mon existence." (P. 103). He did not exaggerate, as this account of his relationship with the marquis shows:

> "M. de Rollebon était mon associé: il avait besoin de moi pour être et j'avais besoin de lui pour ne pas sentir mon être. Moi, je fournissais la matière brute, cette matière dont j'avais à revendre, dont je ne savais que faire: l'existence, *mon* existence. Lui, sa partie, c'était de représenter. Il se tenait en face de moi et s'était emparé de ma vie pour me *représenter* la sienne. Je ne m'apercevais plus que j'existais, je n'existais plus en moi, mais en lui; c'est pour lui que je mangeais, pour lui que je respirais, chacun de mes mouvements avait son sens au-dehors, là, juste en face de moi, en lui; Je n'étais qu'un moyen de le faire vivre, il était ma raison d'être, il m'avait délivré de moi." (Pp. 140-141)

It has been suggested that Roquentin's decision to write a novel is an instance of bad faith. Certainly, the description above with its curiously pathological overtones, bears a close resemblance to the escapist mode of reading, and suggests that the act of writing, too, may be an escape hatch. It implies that escapism may be as powerful a motive for the artist as it often is for the public, and that is true, if we regard it as an attempt to escape from the awareness of contingency and the anguish it induces, by the application of form (hence order and necessity) to lived experience. But it is also an attempt to confront: "Tenir un journal pour y voir clair". And *La Nausée* is after all a record of the rejection of an interpretative grill: that of *les salauds*, for whom the closing time of the public gardens is a law as immutable and as natural as that governing the speed of falling bodies. Nonetheless, the decision to write involves the imposition of rational structures on what Roquentin feels to have no need of such structures, hence, in attempting to come to grips with experience by the use of sequential language a distortion necessarily occurs, and the knowledge that this happens, if the act of writing continues, allows for a deliberate escape from the despair engendered by the experience of one's own and the world's contingency. But perhaps there is no issue, and the enterprise is bound to fail. Still, the attempt at escape has a double-edged quality, in that it is to some extent an act of *mauvaise foi* and at the same time a genuine search for significance.

This is equally relevant in Revel's case, whose diary is at once a protective measure against Bleston's insidious influence, and an effort to come to grips with it.

The reasons behind Roquentin's abandonment of his work on M. de Rollebon are complex but one of them would appear to be the too rigid distinction he makes between the real and the imaginary. According to Butor, although we are continually obliged to make this distinction, it can never be more than "une frontière très poreuse, très instable, frontière qui recule constamment." (R 2, 89). The way to reach the truth is not to cast out the imaginary, but to "confronter inlassablement, méthodiquement, ce que nous racontons d'habitude avec ce que nous voyons, entendons, avec les informations que nous recevons ... 'travailler' sur le récit!" (R 2, 89).

This describes Jacques Revel's activity precisely, and arguably, Roquentin's too, in his one valid work, his diary, *La Nausée*.

It would seem, however, that this enterprise, honourable and courageous as it is, has had the effect of making schizophrenics of both of them. Or perhaps it is in the pursuit of this enterprise, so foreign to the bourgeois notion of phychic normality, that their schizophrenia consists. This would not invalidate their efforts, however, if we accept the modernist view that mental health, a condition of adjustment, is frequently the equivalent of mental sloth. "The very concept of mental health is felt to involve a naive trust, an unwarranted confidence in the stability and continuity of a man-interpreted world. It is the product of ignorance, self-deceit and fear and is impatient of dissent from the model of the universe to which it clings."[15] Roquentin and Revel do not adjust to their environments and the implication is that they are right not to do so, despite the suffering that results from their refusal; that theirs is the way of existential health.

Be that as it may, both characters show symptoms of schizophrenia. Roquentin experiences lapses of self-awareness, when, for example, he looks in the mirror and notes that "ce que je vois, est bien au-dessous du singe, à la lisière du monde végétal, au niveau des polypes." (P. 30) and Revel feels himself threatened by the fear of dwindling into a "somnambule, fantôme, larve" (P. 162). They share an unusual attitude towards the phenomenal world in that both of them regard Matter as animate. What are normally regarded as inanimate objects inspire distrust and even fear in Roquentin, "J'ai peur d'entrer en contact avec eux, tout comme s'ils étaient des bêtes vivantes." (P. 22). For Revel it is the entire city of Bleston which is invested with this sinister life and which threatens to penetrate and absorb him, rather in the same way that objects thrust themselves at Roquentin. Matter is particularly frightening to Sartre's hero because he believes that the so-called "Laws" of Nature are simply comforting fictions. Nature is merely a creature of habit: "Je la *vois* moi, cette nature, je la *vois* ... Je sais que sa soumission est paresse, je sais qu'elle n'a pas de lois: ce qu'ils prennent pour sa constance ... Elle n'a que des habitudes et elle peut en changer demain." (P. 222). It is Nature herself, rather than the city of Bouville specifically, that threatens Roquentin. His attitude to cities generally is equivocal, however, since he fears them yet uses them as a temporary refuge against the tide of vegetation which, Triffid-like, menaces them from without, and which will eventually penetrate and smother them, a parallel of the fate dreaded by the schizophrenic. At the same time, Bouville, "une belle cité bourgeoise", typifies a working model of the universe which Roquentin refuses to accept.

Revel, on the other hand, is threatened by Bleston itself, but the images in which his fears are crystallised are remarkably similar to those invoked by Roquentin. He too, for example, seeks to resist encroaching vegetation, "car il me faut ... reconquérir pied à pied mes propres terrains sur les prêles qui les ont envahis et les camouflent, sur les eaux mousseuses qui les pourrissent et les empêchent de produire autre chose que cette végétation friable et charbonneuse."[16] (P. 53). Revel also fears the contamination of Blaston's *vase*, feels himself besieged by "une sorte de terreur immobile et muette telle une eau glacée ... lourde de boue" and refers to the "marécage de Bleston" , expressions which, like the "eaux mousseuses" mentioned above, bring Bouville vividly to mind and by extension, the whole notion of viscosity, an important feature of Sartre's thought.

Revel continually fears that he will be swallowed up by Bleston; his diary is intended as a fortress to protect him against the city's insidious incursions on his personality: "j'ai décidé d'élever autour de moi ce rempart de lignes sur des feuilles blanches, sentant ... comme je m'obscurcissais, combien j'avais déjà dû laisser pénétrer de vase dans mon crâne," (P. 290). Roquentin's diary is also, at least implicitly, an instrument for preservation of the self,but whereas Revel claims a draw in his contest with Bleston ("Nous sommes quittes!" P. 377), Roquentin acknowledges defeat ("j'ai perdu la partie", P. 220). We must conclude, therefore, that although each speaks of having "survived" himself (a phrase, incidentally, which indicates scission), dissimilar experiences are being described. "Je suis le survivant de moi-même dans cette année" (P. 397), Revel notes. "Je vais me survivre.", says Roquentin, "Manger, dormir. Dormir, manger. Exister lentement, doucement, comme ces arbres, comme une flaque d'eau, comme la banquette rouge du tramway." (P. 220).

The basic difference in their attitudes is this: that Revel feels that a phase of his life is drawing to a close. He remarks that: "il n'est plus temps pour moi de faire de nouveaux projets à l'intérieur de mon séjour," (P. 397), while for Roquentin no more projects are possible, ever; hence he declares: "Aujourd'hui ma vie prend fin." (P. 220). All his attempts to graft a meaning on life have failed; he is condemned to the nausea of existence, locked in the present, since the past is dead and the future (as he lacks the ability to formulate any further projects) a matter of indifference. Roquentin's survival is emblematic of his defeat. Although Revel too speaks of "ma défaite et ma survivance" (P. 393) the connotation is different; his defeat is the condition of his survival.

It is true that the defeat is all too obvious, in terms of human relationships at least; two abortive love affairs and all his friendships with men flawed (by betrayal, George Burton, by jealousy, Lucien Blaise, by suspicion, James Jenkins). With such a tally one might begin to wonder if the contest with Bleston did not end in outright defeat after all, a defeat of which his illusion of survival is the bitterest proof. But the truth is that he really *has* survived, paradoxically by virtue of that exclusion which constitutes his defeat and which the engagements of the Bailey girls substantiates:

> "Je sais qui toute une aventure qui prenait forme depuis mon arrivée ici, est maintenant parvenue à son terme; toute une figure s'est achevée puisqu'en dehors de moi, malgré moi mais par moi, pour ma douleur et presque pour ma mort, pour ma transformation en ce fantôme que je suis devenu ... se sont rejoints cette Ann et ce James comme il y a un mois s'étaient rejoints Lucien et Rose. ...
>
> Toute une figure s'est achevée dans cette exclusion de moi-même;" (P. 377).

He has been excluded, extruded, by Bleston as if he were a foreign body, hence he has not been absorbed, his worst fear has not been realised.

The diary then has fulfilled its function, though at great cost on the affective level. Indeed the pain of exclusion is such that he is seized by a desire to destroy the diary itself, at once the cause of his defeat and of his survival, since his absorption in it has blinded him to the shifting currents of emotion around him, even as it provided Bleston with a nice revenge for having been burned in effigy (on the occasion when Revel set fire to his street plan). Again, significantly, it is the diary itself, its very physical existence, which enables him to evade this final trap:

> "Toutes ces phrases et ces pages, ce qui les a sauvées, m'a sauvé, c'est leur nombre, c'est le temps qu'il aurait fallu; toute cette pile de pages, sur laquelle j'ai recommencé à en amasser de nouvelles, cette chaîne de phrases que j'allonge, ce qui m'a permis de les conserver intactes, c'est le poids des heures passées; c'est ce nombre, ce temps, ce poids qui m'ont permis de ne pas suivre l'insidieux conseil insistant, d'attendre qui la voix se lasse ou change," (Pp. 378-379).

The record of his interrogation of Bleston stands, his *Emploi du temps*, time regained, made concrete in space. It has served a double purpose, helping him to an understanding of Bleston and revealing the city to itself. Art interrogates reality, and its object is not to provide answers but to formulate the right questions. The weight of hours which Revel devotes to the diary saves him from being absorbed by Bleston and also saves the diary itself from destruction, the diary which is at once the record and the cause of his survival and of the changes that have taken place in him, as well as being the instrument by which Bleston itself will be transformed.

All of Butor's most profound beliefs about art are here: its power to explain and teach, to reveal men and the world to themselves and to each other and by doing so to change them for the better; results which can only be achieved however, at the cost of considerable self-sacrifice on the part of the artist. The game is one of "qui perd, gagne" and the prize combines defeat and survival.

It is in this utopianism, perhaps, that the difference between Bouville and Bleston, Roquentin and Revel, ultimately lies. "Je vous vois maintenant, rues de Bleston, vos murs, vos inscriptions et vos visages; je vois briller pour moi, au fond de vos regards apparemment vides, la précieuse matière première avec laquelle je puis faire l'or;" (P. 397), Revel declares. But Roquentin, looking down on Bouville, notes that a time will probably come when he will ask himself; "'Mais enfin, quand j'étais à Bouville, qu'est-ce que je pouvais donc faire, au long de la journée?'" and he concludes "'Et de ce soleil, de cet après-midi, il ne restera rien, pas même un souvenir.'" (P. 220). The mud of Bouville will not be transmuted into gold.

This fundamental difference in attitude, which is based on opposing views of man's capacity to preserve his experience against the ravages of time, calls to mind the novel to which this question is absolutely central: *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Proust's work has been invoked in connection with both *La Nausée* and *L'Emploi du temps*,[17] but separately. A complex relationship exists between the three novels however, of which the triangle whose points are Combray, Bleston and Bouville is paradigmatic. Based on a common preoccupation with time, this relationship has profound implications for the writing of fiction and the problems which it poses, an issue which each of the three books explores.

Le roman comme recherche du temps perdu.

The very title of Butor's novel evokes Proust's work and suggests that both deal with the same theme. Time figures in both titles and there is a sense in which an *emploi du temps* is *une recherche du temps perdu.* In the initial stages of the diary, Revel uses the word *recherche* with particular emphasis to describe the activity he is about to initiate. In the entry for the nineteenth of May, two successive paragraphs begin with the phrase: "C'est maintenant que commence la véritable recherche;" (Pp. 51 & 52), a device frequently used in *L'Emploi du temps*, incidentally, when Butor particularly wishes to capture the reader's attention. The style and content of the novel support the validity of the reminiscence in the title and Butor's amply documented interest in Proust further reinforces the claim that *A la recherche du temps perdu* has had an important influence on *L'Emploi du temps*. In Butor's own words:

> "' ... j'ai beaucoup travaillé sur Proust. De tous les romanciers français, il est sûrement, avec Balzac, celui que j'ai le plus interrogé. De tous les écrivains français de sa génération, seul Claudel a pu exercer sur moi une influence aussi profonde.
>
> Comment se manifeste-t-elle? D'autres que moi seront mieux à même de l'établir.'"[18]

A la recherche du temps perdu is a meditation on three principal themes: Time, Memory and Art. The statement it makes could be drawn up, very baldly, thus: Time destroys, not only youth and beauty, but our very selves, since the individual is but a succession of moments; there is only one agent capable of re-integrating the continually disintegrating personality and that is involuntary memory; however, the victory, achieved by its agency over time, is fleeting, and experienced purely on an individual basis, "l'interpénétration des âmes" being impossible; it is through the work of art alone that the revelation of involuntary memory is fixed and communicated; the achievement of this goal requires heroic self-sacrifice on the part of the artist.

L'Emploi du temps is a re-statement of these themes, with variations.[19] For Revel too, time is a destructive force. As he notes:

> " ... dans mon souvenir, toutes ces semaines dont le nombre m'épouvante, quand je consulte mon calendrier, dont chacune a passé si lentement, se contractent presque en une seule immense, épaisse, compacte, confuse," (P. 52).

In contrast with Proust, who might be said to have total recall, Revel admits that " ... il me serait bien difficile de préciser à quel moment s'est produit tel minime événement qui a occupé pourtant longtemps nos brèves conversations de collègues" (P. 52) and of course he never succeeds in remembering what happened on the twenty-ninth of February of his year in Bleston. Time thus threatens to deprive him even of the fruits of voluntary memory, which always seem readily available to Proust, and it is in response to this threat that Revel begins his journal:

> " ... car je ne me contenterai pas de cette abréviation vague, je ne me laisserai pas frustrer de ce passé dont je sais bien qu'il n'est pas vide, puisque je mesure la distance qui me sépare de celui que j'étais en arrivant, non seulement mon enfoncement, mon égarement, mon aveuglement, mais aussi mon enrichissement sur certains plans, mes progrès dans la connaissance de cette ville et ses habitants, de son horreur et de ses moments de beauté; car il me faut reprendre possession de tous ces événements que je sens fourmiller et s'organiser à travers le nuage qui tente de les effacer, les évoquer un par un dans leur ordre, afin de les sauver avant qu'ils n'aient sombré entièrement dans ce grand marais de poussière grasse," (Pp. 52-53).

Such a pedestrian reconstruction of the past is of course quite foreign to Proust's enterprise, and he would judge it to be quite valueless, since for him voluntary memory only restores the husk of reality.

Although Revel's efforts are directed towards conscious recall of his past, however, his ultimate objective is the same as Proust's; the re-integration of the self, which is threatened with eclipse: "c'était bien ce genre de folie que j'appréhendais, cet obscurcissement de moi-même)," (P. 11). And just as it would be wrong to regard the Proustian reminiscence as simply emotion recollected in tranquillity, when it is invariably productive of something quite new, so too Revel's painstaking reconstruction of the past brings forth new things, exemplifying Butor's dictum that "la forme étant un principe de choix ... des formes nouvelles révéleront dans la réalité des choses nouvelles," (R 1, P. 9). Thus just as the title *A la recherche du temps perdu* changed its meaning in the course of the novel (*le temps perdu* was originally intended by Proust to mean idle moments, and the book to follow in the tradition of *Les Plaisirs et les jours*), so Revel's *emploi du temps* burgeons into an interrogation of the reality of living in a modern industrial city. Both books were begun as a refuge against the world, each becomes "un livre ouvert dans lequel le monde entier doit pouvoir se voir ... se changer ... et se voir changer." (R 2, 292). In the case of Proust's novel, Butor attributes this transformation particularly to "ces étapes fondamentales de réflexion qui sont les oeuvres d'art imaginaires," (R 2, 292).

His essay, "Les oeuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust" suggests that he may have been consciously imitating this aspect of *A la recherche du temps perdu* when he provided such a rich array of imaginary works of art for Revel's contemplation. In the course of the essay, he describes the function of such works in Proust's novel as follows:

> "Je voudrais montrer comment à travers elles Proust prend peu à peu conscience du développement de son propre travail, comment elles sont des modes de sa réflexion créatrice." (R 2, 252).

The word *réflexion* here carries a double sense. It connotes a mirror-image as well as a meditation. Thus the movement which compells Vinteuil's sonata to exuberate into the final septuor is at once the cause and the consequence of the increasingly complex structure of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The development of the one *reflects* a parallel development in the other while at the same time providing a field of meditation from which the necessity for such a development will grow. In addition Butor traces a progression from music through painting to language which he finds reflected in the relationship between the Sonata, the paintings of Elstir and *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Meaning, expressed wordlessly in music, is represented pictorially in space and finally articulated in language. Proust himself likened his great work to a cathedral and Butor pursues this architectural quality of *A la recherche du temps perdu* showing that by a process analogous to that which leads from the sonata to the novel, Time itself is given substance in space and is thus recovered.

There are four major imaginary works of art in *L'Emploi du temps: Le meurtre de Bleston*, the detective story by George Burton, *le vitrail de Caïn* in Bleston's Old Cathedral, *les tapisseries Harvey* in the Museum and the New Cathedral itself. Revel immediately seizes on *Le Meurtre de Bleston* as a guide to his experience in the city. By the end of the book, however, he has transferred his interest to the "deux grands hiéroglyphes:, the tapestries and the stained glass window: "ce signe majeur qui a organisé toute ma vie dans notre année, Bleston ... ces morceaux de verre taillés et joints dans la France du seizième siècle, dont les harmoniques historiques principales s'intercalent entre celles des tapisseries du Musée comme les doigts d'une main entre ceux de l'autre lorsquelles se croisent". (P. 433). *Le Meurtre de Bleston* is eventually discarded on account of its bitter tirade against the New Cathedral, which it describes as "'cette misérable farce', 'this make-believe'". (P. 174). Incapable of doing justice to the New Cathedral, Burton's novel is therefore inadequate to represent Bleston.[20] It will be supplanted by Revel's diary. There is a parallel here with the fate of Bergotte in Proust's novel, the writer on whom Proust initially intended to model himself. The developing structure of his own work modified this intention. As Butor remarks: "Merveille ce démon intérieur à son travail, contraignant peu à peu Proust, lequel aurait bien voulu faire des livres de 'douceur' à la Bergotte, à assombrir se prodigeusement son encre." (R 2, 255). It was this same *démon* which caused Proust's novel to become increasingly complex, hence the number of volumes to proliferate. Butor analyses this process of *dédoublement* and points out that:

> " ... ce dédoublement de la deuxième partie contraint la Sonate à s'y présenter avec une diversité plus grande. On devait passer d'un seul instrument à deux instruments différents." (R 2, 257).

This very multiplication of instruments or voices is characteristic of *L'Emploi du temps*, which starts out as a straight recapitulation of the events from September to May until, with the irruption of the present into the narrative, and Revel's increasing urge to read what he has written, it becomes a 3-part melody in which three voices: the remote past, the recent past and the present, combine. He describes how this comes about in a sentence which might have come straight from *A la recherche du temps perdu:*

> "Ainsi, chaque jour, éveillant de nouveaux jours harmoniques, transforme l'apparence du passé, et cette accession de certaines régions à la lumiere genéralement s'accompagne de l'obscurcissement d'autres jadis eclairées qui deviennent étrangères et muettes jusqu'à ce que, le temps ayant passé, d'autres échos viennent les réveiller." (P. 432).

The harmonic series of Revel's days mirrors the interlocking harmonics of the stained glass window and the tapestries. These in turn open on "d'autres périodes" and "d'autres villes" until the whole history of Western Man is subsumed.

> "Ainsi la succession primaire des jours anciens ne nous est jamais rendue qu'à travers une multitude d'autres, changeantes, chaque événement faisant en résonner d'autres antérieurs qui en sont l'origine, l'explication, ou l'homologue, chaque monument, chaque objet, chaque image nous renvoyant à d'autres périodes qu'il est nécessaire de ranimer pour y retrouver le secret perdu de leur puissance bonne ou mauvaise, d'autres périodes souvent lointaines et oubliées dont l'épaisseur et la distance se mesurent non plus par semaines ou par mois mais par siècles, se détachant sur le fond confus et obscur de notre histoire entière, bien au-delà des limites de notre année, Bleston, d'autres périodes et d'autres villes bien au-delà de tes frontières comme celles qui se superposaient dans ma vision samedi, tandis que je regardais les tapisseries du Musée, ses grandes illustrations de laine, de soie d'argent et d'or, qui m'ont si souvent servi de termes de référence dans ton déchiffrage, Bleston, dont les arbres m'ont fait découvrir certains de tes arbres, et les saisons voir tes saisons, qui ont si fort pesé sur mon destin, ces points noués en France au dix-huitième siècle, par lesquels m'atteignaient, nous atteignaient, Bleston, une légende très antique transmise par la culture latine, par ce grec impérial Plutarque ('ici finit la ville de Thésée, ici commence celle d'Hadrien'), une légende dont l'ordonnance datait de la puissance d'Athènes, et à travers laquelle toute une histoire antérieure se transmettait, perpétuant le nom de Minos, rappelant un arrangement de la réalité très fondamental et très recouvert. (P. 432-433).

The tapestries represent the Greco-Latin side of our heritage (the rooms in which they are displayed open on

Greek Street and Roman Street), the Judeo-Christian element is introduced by the *Vitrail de Caïn*.

The work of art-nexus discerned by Butor in *A la recherche du temps perdu* is mirrored in *L'Emploi du temps*. The imaginary works of art operate on each other as well as on the novel as a whole and the novel on them. The link between *Les tapisseries Harvey* and *L'Emploi du temps* illustrates this particularly well.

These tapestries, woven in France in the eighteenth century, depict eighteen episodes in the life of Theseus. Revel visits them on several occasions, applying them as an interpretative grill to his year in Bleston and, in fantasy, distributing the roles of Ariadne, Phèdre, Pirithous and Dionysus among his acquaintance, initially reserving the part of Theseus to himself. Just as Butor catalogues seven principal "epiphanies" of *la petite phrase de Vinteuil*, we can list six separate visits to the tapestries on the part of Revel. Like the *petite phrase* they do not always appear in the same guise. Revel's grasp of the underlying mythology, very limited to begin with, progressively brings out the resonances of the eighteen panels as it develops. Similarly, the distribution of the roles alters to fit the changing patterns of Revel's personal relationships. When his attention veers from Ann (Ariadne) to Rose Bailey (Phèdre) he is compelled to relinquish the part of Theseus for that of Dionysus. When this is stolen from him (together with Rose herself) by Lucien Blaise he tries to become Theseus to Ann's Ariadne again only to find that James Jenkins has stepped into the part. The tapestries, therefore, like the music, are given successively different "interpretations". There are two parallel developments; the progressively revealed complexities of the panels reflecting the increasing complexity of the personal relationships, and *vice versa*.

In addition, the Harvey Tapestries are linked, in Revel's mind, with the *Vitrail de Caïn* (Cain is depicted in a costume and attitude resembling those of Theseus when slaying the Minotaur; the stained glass is the work of sixteenth century French artists) interlocked, as he says "comme les doigts d'une main entre ceux de l'autre lorsqu'elles se croisent", just like the interweaving of the strands of Jacques Revel's year, which is conveyed by precisely the same image:

> "Ce sont ces régions-là qui sont venues au premier plan ce soir, passant entre celles qui s'étaient éveillées hier, comme les doigts d'une main entre ceux de l'autre lorsqu'elles se croisent;" (Pp. 429-430).

Only three pages of text separate these references to interlocking fingers, so that it is clearly Butor's intention to sound the same note in the reader's consciousness.

This is reinforced by the repetition of the word *harmoniques* (Ainsi chaque jour, éveillant de nouveaux jours harmoniques", [P. 432], "les harmoniques historiques principales" [P. 433]), which makes its first appearance, complete with definition, on page 428.

Describing the process by which "jours harmoniques" are evoked, Revel notes that:

> " ... ce qui conditionnait mes phrases ... c'était cette région du mois d'août pendant laquelle j'avais écrit les pages que je venais de lire, et les régions plus anciennes qu'elles concernaient, fragments d'avril, janvier, et juin, et, grâce à ce dernier, un fragment de novembre, donc toute une série de bandes plus ou moins claires separées par de larges zones d'ombre, comme les raies en quoi se décompose l'éclat d'un corps incandescent sur l'écran noir d'un spectroscope, tout une série de résonances plus ou moins intenses separées par de larges intervalles à peu près muets, comme les harmoniques en quoi se décompose le timbre d'un son." (P. 428).

This *intercalage* of the various *bandes de souvenir*[21] is reflected in the relationship between window and the tapestries and between them both, separately and together, and Revel. Theseus and company are seen through the eyes of eighteenth century France; while Revel surveys them both from the perspective of the twentieth century, with French eyes, but against an English background.

In comparing these *bandes de souvenir* to light refracted through a prism and to a harmonic series, Butor invites us to recall his analysis of the *intercalage* between the work of Vinteuil and Elstir and the parallel between the constantly multiplying elements in Proust's novel and the expansion of the sonata from a piece for piano only to a piece for piano and violin and so on to the septuor.

> "Le passage de l'exécution Verdurin, piano seul, à l'exécution Sainte-Euverte, piano et violon, nous mène donc d'une musique antèrieure au langage, à une musique qui lui est postèrieure, idéal de celui-ci, lequel, impliqué tout entier dans l'intermédiaire, joue le rôle de prisme.
>
> Cette métaphore du prisme, qui va jouer un rôle si important dans le septuor, ce passage à la couleur nécessité en particulier par l'intervention de l'oeuvre d'Elstir, est déjà annoncé dans l'exécution Sainte-Euverte de la sonate." (R 2, 262).

Revel, struggling to "réduire au mieux les lacunes de cette description exploratrice que je compose, forge et tisse," (P. 387) assumes the mantle of the three sons of Cain, "Yabal, ancêtre de tous ceux qui filent ... Yubal, ancêtre de tous les musiciens ... Tubalcaïn, ancêtre de tous ceux qui travaillent les métaux," (Pp. 103-104), whose three separate tasks are subsumed in that of the writer, composing his work on a musical analogy, grasping his material with "de solides et souples ténailles de langage" (P. 436) in order to weave a tapestry as lastingly instructive as those commissioned by the Duke of

Harvey, " ... par lesquelles m'atteignaient, nous atteignaient, Bleston, une légende très antique ... rappelant un arrangement de la réalité très fondamental et très recouvert." (P. 433).

The effort to recall and the effort to understand are inextricably linked in *L'Emploi du temps*. Revel must *remember* his year in Bleston in order to make sense of it but more than this, in trying to remember he is already moving in the direction of understanding. In this, as in so much else, he echoes Proust.

In his essay "Les Moments de Marcel Proust", Butor brings out the distinction between the two kinds of *moment*, *les impressions* and *les réminiscences*, at the same time showing that this distinction, though necessary at a certain point in the text, eventually disappears. He quotes from Proust:

> "'Cependant, je m'avisais au bout d'un moment et après avoir pensé à ces résurrections de la mémoire que, d'une autre façon, des impressions obscures avaient quelquefois, et déjà à Combray, du côté de Guermantes, sollicité ma pensée, à la façon de ces réminiscences, mais qui cachaient non une sensation d'autrefois, mais une vérité nouvelle, une image précieuse que je cherchais à decouvrir par des efforts du même genre que ceux qu'on fait pour se rappeler quelque chose ... que déjà à Combray, je fixais avec attention devant mon esprit quelque image qui m'avait forcé à la regarder, un nuage, un

> triangle, un clocher, une fleur, un caillou, en sentant qu'il y avait peut-être sous ces signes quelque chose de tout autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir, une pensée qu'ils traduisaient à la façon de ces caractères hiéroglyphes qu'on croirait représenter seulement des objets matériels.'" (R 1, P. 163).

This passage shows the connection drawn by Proust between the effort to decipher the message of things and to remember, and as Butor points out, it is curious that the activity initiated by the *impressions* is closer to the Platonic reminiscence than to the Proustian one.

Revel refers to the tapestries and the window as "deux grands hiéroglyphes" but his cryptographic efforts extend over Bleston in its entirety. *Chiffre* and *décryptage* are words which recur frequently. He suggests that through his text Bleston may be enabled to pursue its reading of itself. But his text resembles a detective story in many respects, and he re-reads it, as James Jenkins re-reads detective stories, perhaps for the same reason. As Jenkins says:

> "'Ils prennent alors une sorte de transparance. A travers les illusions du début, vous entrevoyez la vérité dont vous avez plus ou moins gardé le souvenir.'" (Pp. 128-129).

The Platonic note here is as strong as in the passage Butor quotes from Proust.

The great task of décryptage is however only accomplished at great cost. The reconstruction of his *emploi du temps* fills more and more of Revel's *emploi du temps*, pushing other activities ever further into the margins of his life, causing in part his disappointments in love. By the twenty-fifth of September, Revel has become, in his own eyes, a ghost. "Fantôme samedi dans la maison d'All Saints Gardens" ... "Fantôme, dans l'après-midi de dimanche" ... "Fantôme, chaque soir ..."; three successive paragraphs of the diary begin thus. Earlier he had described himself as "le survivant de moi-même dans cette année".

"C'est déjà son propre fantôme qui raconte son aventure.", Butor writes of Proust.

> "Il ne s'attaque sérieusement à son grand oeuvre magique qu'au moment de la première crise grave, ce grand oeuvre qui est une façon non seulement de mourir mais de survivre au milieu de tous ces vivants d'apparence, de tous ces aveugles gens du monde, qui voudraient le captiver." (R 1, 171).

Revel's heroic self-sacrifice to his diary recalls Proust's retreat to the cork-lined room. Butor has remarked to Georges Charbonnier that the work of art comes from "au-delà de la mort" but that paradoxically, it is also the positive equivalent of suicide. It is a reprieve from "l'arrêt de mort" which hangs over the writer. "Si j'écris, c'est pour ne pas me faire mourir." (Entretiens, 37). Like Proust, Butor likens the writer to Scheherezade.

But where does this threat of death originate? According to Butor, in the fact that inspiration springs from "un désaccord avec la réalité qui nous entoure" which is particularised in the artist's being at odds with himself; "Il y a un individu qui est profondément mal à l'aise". "Cet abcès qu'est l'écrivain, ce furoncle qu'est l'individu" (Entretiens, 38), what is society to do with him? Cast him out? Confine him in an asylum? This frequently happens, but in certain cases the individual is able to reverse the situation. Instead of killing himself or being eliminated, he is able to exert his influence on society so as to adapt it to *his* point of view. "Dans ce désaccord vécu, et douloureusement vécu, naturellement, l'individu réussit à trouver une solution qui lui permet de ne pas se supprimer, qui lui permet de faire un travail, une oeuvre." (Entretiens, Pp. 37-39).

These words of Butor's are pertinent to Proust, Roquentin and Revel. It is only after nearly dying on the stairs that Proust begins *A la recherche du temps perdu*. It is in the wake of an attack of *la nausée* that Roquentin starts his journal. After a crisis which culminates in his deliberately burning the street map of Bleston, Revel embarks on his diary.

> "Ainsi, dans le travail littéraire, il y a en quelque sorte la mort qui est incluse et dépassée. On peut dire, donc, que l'écrivain, le poète, qui réussit son travail, nous parle de l'autre côté de la mort. Il y a de toute façon dans la littérature, ce travail pour donner une durée au langage, et par conséquent pour dépasser la conception et la perception habituelle du temps." (Entretiens, 39).

This statement has important implications for Butor's technique in *L'Emploi du temps*, a novel in which language achieves duration, and conveys it, in a remarkable way.

"Composition is time."
Gertrude Stein

"Donner une durée au langage", most people who write creatively will recognise, in this phrase of Butor's, an accurate description of the task they confront and, incidentally, of the difficulties attendant upon it. It is a phrase which is hard to explain unless by such an appeal to experience but perhaps further reference to one of Butor's essays on Proust may be helpful.

Swann, listening to Vinteuil's Sonata, tries to picture it in spatial terms. Butor quotes from Proust:

> "'Ainsi, à peine la sensation délicieuse que Swann avait ressentie était-elle expirée, que sa mémoire lui en avait fourni séance tenante une transcription sommaire et provisoire, mais sur laquelle il avait jeté les yeux tandis que le morceau continuait, si bien que, quand la même impression était tout d'un coup revenue, elle n'était déjà plus insaisissable. Il s'en représentait l'étendue, les groupements symétriques, la graphie, la valeur expressive; il avait devant lui cette chose qui n'est plus de la musique pure, qui est du dessin, de l'architecture, de la pensée, et qui permet de se rappeler la musique.'",

and comments:

> "Il ne s'agit point ici de la notation de cette phrase, mais de sa spatialité essentielle, ou plus exactement de sa capacité de spatialisation qui rend possible une notation conventionnelle quelle qu'elle soit. C'est par l'établissement d'un espace sonore en quelque sorte concurrent de l'espace optique que la musique accède à la représentation, qu'elle nous dit quelque chose. C'est d'ailleurs la constitution d'un tel espace que permet l'avènement du langage articulé." (R 2, 258).

Butor proposes the progression: music, painting, language, as a paradigm of the process that resulted in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. While it is particularly appropriate to Proust's novel, it might be applied, by extension, to the complex interaction of conception and expression which results in any piece of literature, or at least, to Butor's notion of this process.

"Ce travail pour donner une durée au langage et par conséquent pour dépasser la conception et la perception habituelle du temps" is accomplished by means of a *spatialisation* which recalls a parallel phase in Swann's appropriation of the sonata. Butor sees the novel and music as being closely related because of "la valeur privilégiée du travail romanesque dans l'exploration temporelle, l'étroite parenté de cet art avec un autre se déployant avant tout dans le temps: la musique", (R 2, 42), but this very temporal aspect implies "une capacité de spatialisation" since "pour étudier le temps dans sa continuité, donc pouvoir mettre en evidence des lacunes, il est nécessaire de l'appliquer sur une espace, de le considérer comme un parcours, un trajet." (R 2, 95) "Donner une durée au langage" implies establishing a space which it will fill.[22] As Butor remarks, we refer to a book as a "volume". (R 2, 43).

The close link between *la durée* and space is nowhere more evident than in the metaphors used by the philosopher celebrated for his contemplation of the world *sub specie durationis*, Henri Bergson. This has not escaped Butor's notice:

> "N'est-il pas singulier que les métaphores employées par Bergson pour nous rendre sensibles à certains aspects 'continus' de notre expérience du temps soient justement à son insu des métaphores éminemment spatiales: le courant de conscience, le fleuve, le cône de la mémoire, ou encore ce morceau de sucre qu'il nous invite à observer tandis qu'il se dissout peu à peu dans un verre d'eau, expérience qui ne peut nous donner un tel sentiment de lenteur - 'il faut attendre que le sucre fonde' - que parce que nous sommes capables de mesurer, constatant ce qu'il demeure du volume primitif, la vitesse du processus." (R 2, 95).

If it is true that Bergson employed spatial imagery unwittingly, Butor goes a step further by using the same means consciously to emphasise the interdependence of time and space in his second novel, which he has described as "un exercice de continuité et surtout un exercice de la lenteur." (Entretiens, 92).

The very physical aspect of the book (never a matter of indifference to Butor) strongly suggests this, with its interplay between the title *L'Emploi du temps* and the sole illustration, the map of Bleston; prefiguring not only the relationship between Time and Space, but more specifically, the close connection between Revel's map of Bleston and his diary, or *emploi du temps*.

Revel, in fact, owns two successive maps of the city. Having burned the first in a fit of aberration, he is compelled to buy a replacement, ostensibly because he is still unable to find his way round Bleston without one, but really because he is frightened by the violence of his destructive impulse and wishes to wipe out the memory of it. In a sense, the ritual burning of the map is the direct cause of the diary, since it brings home to him the extent of the city's effect on him and incites him to begin the diary as a defence measure. His hurried replacement of the burned map fails in its object, however, because the second copy, although an exact replica of the original is new and unsullied by frequent consultations. It lacks the patina of its predecessor, veteran of so many weary trudges through wet streets, companion of so many mediocre meals in lugubrious restaurants. The difference between the two maps is quite simply *time*, measured by and on the dirty worn surface of one of them, where grime and wear have given it substance.

This notion of time as a *deposit* is repeated throughout *L'Emploi du temps*, bringing in its wake references to geology and archaeology, sciences that measure time in strata. The following sentence may be taken as an example:

> "Ainsi, même en moi, quelque chose a traversé ces saisons sans croître ni s'abolir, l'alluvionnement des heures a réservé certains espaces-témoins, et tandis que je déambule, cherchant la raison de moi-même, dans ce terrain vague que je suis devenu, tâtonnant sur d'énormes masses de dépot, tout d'un coup je trébuche au bord d'une faille au fond de laquelle le sol d'antan est resté nu, mesurant alors l'épaisseur de cette matière qu'il faut que je sonde et tamise, afin de retrouver des assises et des fondations." 23 (P. 173).

The spatial quality of the metaphors used here is as remarkable, and for the same reasons, as those used by Bergson, but his influence on the novel is not confined to this one aspect.

One of Bergson's major contributions to philosophy was his development of the idea that clock time has really very little to do with time as we experience it and live it: "le temps de la physique ne dure pas.". Physical time is no more than a series of punctuation marks, since it only indicates the extremities of intervals, whereas to seize *la durée* is to come to grips with our innermost self, *notre propre moi*, which is a continuum. At the core of one's being, according to Bergson:

> "C'est une succession d'états dont chacun annonce ce qui suit et contient ce qui précede. A vrai dire, ils ne constituent des états multiples que lorsque je les ai déjà dépassés et que je me retourne en arrière pour en observer la trace. Tandis que je les éprouvait, ils étaient si solidement organisés, si profondément animés d'une vie commune, que je n'aurais su dire ou l'un quelconque d'entre eux finit, ou

> l'autre commence. En réalité, aucun d'eux ne commence ni ne finit, mais tous se prolongent les uns dans les autres."[24]

This is an accurate description of Revel's experience in *L'Emploi du temps* as he attempts to sort out and record his immediate past. The inordinately long sentences reflect this cumulative consciousness, another instance of *technique* matching *métaphysique*. The following example, which would be an excellent illustration of Bergson's conception of *la durée*, is typical:

> "Tandis que nous mangions à 'l'Oriental Bamboo', ce deuxième samedi d'avril, Lucien m'a demandé qui était George Burton à qui je l'avais présenté la semaine précedente à la sortie d'un autre cinema, de telle sorte que je lui ai expliqué ce que j'en savais, les circonstances de notre rencontre à l'endroit ou nous étions, à peu près deux mois plus tôt, qu'il était venu s'installer à cette table, que la conversation s'est mise à rouler sur le livre que j'avais posé à côté de moi, 'Le Meurtre de Bleston' par J.-C. Hamilton, que je venais de racheter dans une librairie d'occasion, un livre qui m'avait servé de guide aux premiers temps de mon séjour ici, un livre grâce auquel notamment j'avais découvert ce restaurant, un livre que je pouvais lui prêter, à lui Lucien, s'il le voulait., que je lui ai apporté le lendemain à Plaisance Gardens, donc le dimanche 13 avril, qu'il m'a rapporté le samedi suivant, le 19 avril, à cette même table où George Burton l'a revu, à cette même table où un soir de juin, nous avons parlé tous les deux, Lucien et moi, de J.-C. Hamilton et des soeurs Bailey, de cette Rose dont il est le fiancé, avec qui j'ai diné à cette même table il y a dix jours, de cette Ann avec qui je voudrais tant prendre un repas un de ces jours à cette même table parce que c'est là l'endroit, me semble-t-il, où je pourrais le mieux lui parler de ce texte qui j'écris parce que j'ai brûlé le plan de Bleston, que je lui

> avait acheté il y a très longtemps, en octobre, la première fois que je l'ai vue, parce que j'avais brulé le plan de Bleston, ce qui était préfiguré par la destruction du ticket de Plaisance Gardens, un dimanche du mois d'avril, le deuxième dimanche d'avril, le 13 avril, puisque c'est le samedi 12, la veille que nous sommes allés voir, au 'Royal', Lucien et moi, "The Red Nights of Roma', que nous avions parlé du 'Meurtre de Bleston' au restaurant chinois, face à l'Ancienne Cathedrale, sous l'oeil bienveillant de reptile du garçon jaune un peu gras." (P. 335-336).

Revel is writing this in August, describing a meal eaten with Lucien on Saturday April 12th and in the course of this single sentence reference is made to events which occurred a week before that date, two months before, one day after, one week after, in the following June, ten days before the time of writing, in the previous October, on the 13th of April and on the last Sunday in April, the date of the ritual burning of the plan of Bleston. The sentence even manages to push one of its tentacles into the future, by its reference to the projected meal with Ann Bailey.

"Je crois bien", wrote Bergson, "que notre vie intérieure toute entière est quelque chose comme une phrase unique entamée dès le premier éveil de la conscience, phrase semée de virgules, mais nulle part coupée par des points."25

The sentence structure used throughout *L'Emploi du temps* comes as close to Bergson's *phrase unique* as it would seem possible to do. Critics such as Léo Spitzer have referred to this sentence-structure as being "énormément gonflée à la manière de Proust"[26] but rather than imitating the Proustian sentence, it shares with it a common origin in Bergson's conception of the inner life, to which it attempts to give concrete expression. Its cumulative progress illustrates perfectly Bergson's contention that:

> "Ma mémoire est là, qui pousse quelque chose de ce passé dans ce présent. Mon état d'âme, en avançant sur la route du temps, s'enfle continuellement de la durée qu'il remasse; il fait pour ainsi dire, boule de neige avec lui-même."[27]

Using the table at the Oriental Bamboo as an anchor, Butor's sentence, Janus-like, looks before and after, according perfectly with the Bergonsian view that the present cannot be isolated with a mathematical point but that it is already a duration, the flux of the inner life, "... une croissance par le dedans, le prolongement ininterrompu du passé dans un présent qui empiète sur l'avenir."[28]

The necessity of such a complex sentence is illustrated by the fact that *L'Emploi du temps* was written twice. In the first version the sentences were short: "Mais ça ne collait pas", said Butor, "Alors je l'ai refait. Complétement. Phrase par phrase."[29] Although this may have been partly because long sentences come naturally to him, I think that it was largely due to the fact that the *métaphysique* of this particular novel, coinciding as it does with Bergson's conception of *la durée*, demanded to be translated by such a technique.[30] There is a tendency for increasingly cumulative sentences to proliferate as *L'Emploi du temps* progresses. In this way, they mirror, by their frequency as well as by their complex internal structure, the movement of the novel as a whole, which imitates that of a musical canon.

Butor has explained in some detail how, by a process of superposition and repetition, a plurality of "voices" is developed in *L'Emploi du temps*, with the object of obtaining a polyphonic effect similar to that of the canon. Briefly, it works like this: the novel is divided into five parts, one for each of the five months that remain to Revel in Bleston when he begins the diary. Part one records the events of one month, part two, two and so on up to part five which deals with five months. The succession of months does not follow chronological order and the *events* are sometimes recounted in inverse chronological order ("...parce que les événements qui nous frappent provoquent une mise en lumière progressive de ce qui a mene vers eux." [P.411]). Furthermore, Revel not only writes the journal, he reads it as well. The result is that by part five, as Butor points out:

> "...nous aurons cinq voix qui iront ensemble. Une première voix: souvenirs, une deuxième voix: journal, une troisième voix: souvenirs en sens inverse, une quatrième voix: reprise de ce qui a déjà été raconté mais avec un autre éclairage en sens normal et une cinquième voix: reprise de ce qui a déjà été raconté mais ~~en~~ sens inverse." (G. C. 108).

This imitation of a musical form is consistent with Butor's belief in the close relationship between the novel and music. Since this relationship rests largely on the temporal aspect of both art forms and since *L'Emploi du temps* is overtly concerned with the problem of temporality to a degree unusual even among novels, the adoption of a musical model seems the more appropriate.

However true superposition of voices is, in the end, irreconcilable with intelligibility, in the linguistic sense, and a novel, which is normally read by a single reader, cannot lend itself to the superposition of voices which is achieved by a chamber music ensemble, say. It could be argued of course that the counterpoint aimed at by Butor takes place in the hero's mind and hence, by a sort of osmosis, in the mind of the reader, who, as he follows Revel's frequently tortuous chain of associations, is forced to remember the incidents to which they refer, all of which occur in the book and are therefore plausibly within the scope of the reader's knowledge. In this way a kind of contrapuntal structure is elaborated, but

L'Emploi du temps is not a true canon and cannot be one. All the same, Bergson speaks, in connection with *la durée*, of:

> "...la continuité indivisible et indestructible d'une *mélodie* ou le passé entre dans le présent et forme avec lui un tout indivisé et même indivisible en dépit de ce qui s'y ajoute à chaque instant ou plutôt grâce à ce qui s'y ajoute."[31],

and arguably, *L'Emploi du temps* illustrates just such a melodic concept of duration.

Filling in the Spaces[32]

It is clear that *L'Emploi du temps* does not belie its multivalent title. "The time-table, the use of time, the work of time", each of these aspects is represented in the novel. It is, firstly, Jacques Revel's *emploi du temps* and as such acquires a spatial dimension; a time-table is traditionally "filled in". Then it illustrates the use of time both in the sense of how it is employed and of its utility. Revel employs his time in the reconstruction of his *emploi du temps* and the time thus spent preserves both himself and it. Then there is the work of time which is always potentially one of destruction but which the effort at reappropriation renders constructive in the strongest sense, since the result is "ce volume", Revel's journal, which saves him and is in turn saved from destruction by the time it would have taken to burn, hence indirectly, by "le poids des heures passées" which had taken so many pages to record. *L'Emploi du temps* is itself an excellent example of what Butor means by "donner une durée au langage"; the present discussion is evidence that the consequence Butor predicts for this activity: "dépasser la conception et la perception habituelle du temps" does follow.

L'Emploi du temps is a novel of great originality and complexity but it was not produced *in vacuo*. Its own genesis reflects that reappropriation of the past which it posits on two levels; Revel's effort to "reprendre possession de tous ces événements" which eventually leads him to lay claim to the heritage of Western Man, or indeed of Man, *tout court* (Bleston's New Cathedral looks very like an analogy of *The Origin of Species*). Butor's novel is, in a sense, a reappropriation of the investigations of his predecessors. I have singled out the two, Proust and Sartre, who seemed to me most relevant.

As Ezra Pound remarked, "The best criticism of any work ... comes from the creative writer or artist who does the next job;", an opinion with which Butor seems to agree. He claims that even while reading, we invent, hence criticise, adapting the novel to our circumstances, even to the extent of re-writing it, mentally. The titular writer, however, feels the obligation "de pousser beaucoup plus loin ce travail de réécriture, de le prendre en charge, aboutissant à l'établissement de nouveaux modèles pour nous permettre de raconter, de nous raconter, ce qui nous arrive et ce qui arrive," (R 3, 10).

If this principle were applied to the three novels discussed in this chapter, the result, very broadly speaking, would be something like the following: Realism *à la Goncourt* being inadequate for his purpose, Proust wrote *A la recherche du temps perdu*; Sartre, in turn, finding

Proust's *instrument d'optique* distorting, wrote *La Nausée*; Butor, dissatisfied with both models, was compelled to write *L'Emploi du temps*.

It is Butor's contention that writing is born of *dissatisfaction* ("Il y a un individu qui est profondément mal à l'aise."). There is nothing superficial in this; it is by no means a question of tossing aside the work of earlier writers on the grounds that it is outmoded, nor of attacking the integrity of the writers themselves.

> "Ce n'est certes ni par méchanceté ni par incompétence individuelle de son ou ses auteurs que l'oeuvre est devenue si trompeuse, mais c'est que, ce qui a changé, outre les robes, c'est ce que l'on connaît du monde." (R 3, 11).

Yes indeed, and as T. S. Eliot remarked, the work of these authors *is* what we know. Butor is aware of this and values the new work as much for the light it throws on the achievement of its predecessors as for its novelty. "La marque même d'une profonde nouveauté, c'est son pouvoir rétroactif." (R 3, 13). Yet the fact remains that we need "de nouveaux modèles pour nous permettre de raconter."; "Un homme c'est toujours un conteur d'histoires," as Roquentin remarked. However, in his view, "il faut choisir: vivre ou raconter." (*La Nausée*, 60). This was Proust's dilemma and he adopted an extreme personal solution which is reflected in his novel. The discovery of an artistic vocation and the decision to write a book occurs at the end, and the book we have just read is the one which is projected. Living has been blotted out in favour of narration, but this cannot really happen as long as we remain alive. That is Sartre's objection. Butor acknowledges this in *L'Emploi du temps* and shows Revel struggling with the importunate present.

For all that, the writer for Butor (and here he rejoins Proust) is like Scheherezade. Rather than being mutually exclusive, *vivre* and *raconter* amount to the same thing. It is a case of "Il faut raconter pour vivre." That was Proust's position and it is Revel's too. Even Roquentin, all due allowance having been made for Sartre's irony, comes round to this in the end:

> "'Some of these days.
> You'll miss me honey.'
>
> Est-ce que je pourrais pas essayer...Naturellement, il ne s'agirait pas d'un air de musique...mais est-ce que je ne pourrais pas, dans un autre genre?..." (*La Nausée*, 248).

L'Emploi du temps could have been what he had in mind.

[1] Georges Charbonnier, "Noeuds et Charges," *Entretiens avec Michel Butor* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 11.

[2] Michel Butor, *L'Emploi du temps* (1957; rpt. Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, Collection 10 18, 1970). Page references in the text are to this edition.

[3] See Charbonnier, p. 94.

"Dans *L'Emploi du temps* il y a un exercice de la lenteur, un exercice des choses qui se développent comme ça très doucement, des couleurs qui changent très doucement, des formes qui apparaissent très doucement, au début, parce qui si l'on suit le livre, au bout d'un certain temps naturellement les événements se précipitent et ils se précipitent d'autant plus qu'il y a plusieurs séries d'événements qui se mettent à se dérouler ensemble et qu'ainsi on est en quelque sorte bombardé par des événements..."

[4] Sartre, *Situations I*, p. 37.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (1938; rpt. Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1959), p. 62.

[7] Jean Pouillon, "Les règles du je," *Les Temps modernes*, cxxxiv (avril, 1957), 1594.

[8] Pouillon, 1595.

[9] See *L'Emploi du temps*, p. 250: "...dans le roman policier, le récit est fait à contre-courant, puisqu'il commence par le crime."

[10] This evokes a comparison with *Les Gommes*, Alain Robbe-Grillet (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1953). See Jean Miesch, *Robbe-Grillet* (Paris: Eds. Universitaires, 1965): "*Les Gommes* c'est du vent, pourrait-on dire. Pour le lecteur un vent salubre qui le rétablit dans une sorte de virginité, le ramène à un point où la littérature n'a pas commencé d'exister, s'étant détruit de l'intérieur.", p. 149.

Les Gommes may have been intended as a practical demonstration of the tendency of the detective story to go up in smoke. In any case, the effect it creates is one of *gommage* precisely, whereas the content of *L'Emploi du temps* stubbornly resists such an obliteration.

For another interesting variation on the ambiguity of the detective-story, see Anthony Schaffer's play, *Sleuth* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1971), which has also been made into a successful film.

[11] Sartre, *Situations I*, p. 36.

[12] R.-M. Albérès, "Qu'est-ce que le 'structuralisme' dans la Littérature?" *La Revue de Paris* (juillet-aout 1967), p. 13.

[13] Quoted by Dennis Porter, "Sartre, Robbe-Grillet and the Psychotic Hero," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Spring 1970, 13-25.

[14] As far as the role played by imagination in a work about a historical figure is concerned, Sartre's remarks on his study on Flaubert should be noted.

[15] Porter, p. 14.

[16] "Les prêles" (shave-grass) and "cette végétation friable et charbonneuse" referred to here call to mind their opposite, Proust's "herbe drue des oeuvres," perhaps intentionally.

[17] See for example, Rémy G. Saisselin, "Bouville ou l'anti-Combray," *French Review*, 33, (1960), 232-238, and for *L'Emploi du temps*, Jean Pouillon's "Les règles du je" mentioned above.

[18] Michel Butor, "Reconnaissance," *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 21-27, novembre, 1963, p. 7.

[19] Some of Roquentin's remarks about his conception of the past may usefully be quoted here:

> "Certes, depuis longtemps, j'avais compris que le mien m'avait échappé. Mais je croyais, jusqu'alors, qu'il s'était simplement rétiré hors de ma portée. Pour moi le passé n'était qu'une mise à la retraite: c'était une autre manière d'exister, un état de vacances et d'inaction; chaque événement, quand son rôle avait pris fin, se rangeaient sagement, de lui-même, dans une boîte et devenait événement honoraire: tant on a de peine à imaginer le néant. Maintenant, je savais: les choses sont tout entières ce qu'elles paraissent - et *derrière elles* ... il n'y a rien." (*La Nausée*, 137-138).

The criticism of the Proustian attitude to the past is plain in this passage.

Speaking elsewhere of the notion of adventure, and the consciousness of passing time which is its essence, Roquentin says:

> "Je me retourne; derrière moi, cette belle forme mélodique s'enfonce tout entière dans le passé. Elle diminue, en déclinant elle se contracte, à present la fin ne fait plus qu'un avec le commencement." (P. 59).

Revel also experiences this feeling of contraction and the reference to "cette belle forme mélodique" recalls the role played by music in both Proust's novel and Butor's. (*L'Emploi du temps* is meant to resemble a musical canon.) As to the possibility of recovering the past, however, Revel's position is closer to Proust's. In spite of his failure, which is quite ambiguous (see Lucien Dällenbach, *Le livre et ses miroirs dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Michel Butor*, Archives des lettres modernes, 1972(3), VIII, No. 135 (Paris: Minard, 1972), pp. 13-26.) I cannot agree with Jean Pouillon when he describes Revel as "l'anti-Proust".

[20] *Le Meurtre de Bleston* is referred to as "un livre épuisé" (ET, 200) in a characteristic play on words.

[21] This phrase is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's play, *Krapp's Last Tape, (La Dernière bande)*, 1959, which might be said to have a Proustian theme.

[22] See Jacques Maritain, op. cit., p. 290:

> "And that work which is a novel exists only if it 'fills its space'; it exists only by virtue of the consistency between the inner developments and the evolution

of events, and the composition of the reactions of the individual strands to one another. ... A novel, like the novels of Proust, may have almost no concern with action; it has all the more concern with the orchestral arrangement of the free units, each one a universe in itself, which are its parts."

[23] Writing of the "dialogue entre deux temps" in Kierkegaard's "Récit de Souffrances", Butor points out that "C'est entre ces deux 'voix' que joue une 'épaisseur' ou une profondeur psychologique. ...

On va remonter le cours du temps, plonger de plus en plus profondément dans le passé, comme un archéologue ou un géologue qui, dans leurs fouilles, rencontrent d'abord les terrains récents, puis de proche en proche, gagnent les anciens." (R 2, 92).

[24] Henri Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant, Oeuvres*, Textes annotés par André Robinet, Introduction par Henri Gouhier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 1397.

[25] Bergson, "L'Ame et le corps," *L'Energie Spirituelle, Oeuvres*, p. 858.

[26] Léo Spitzer, "Quelques aspects de la technique des romans de M. Butor," *Archivum Linguisticum*, XIV (1962) 49-76 and XIII (1961) 171-195.

[27] Bergson, "De l'évolution de la vie," *L'Evolution Creatrice, Oeuvres*, p. 496.

[28] Bergson, "De la position des problèmes," *La Pensée et le mouvant, Oeuvres*, p. 1312.

[29] "Cinq minutes avec Michel Butor," *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 17 novembre 1956, p. 12.

[30] The manner in which the Harvey Tapestries, or rather Revel's deepening understanding of them, mirrors this development in the elaboration of *L'Emploi du temps*, illustrates the role of the imaginary work of art in Butor's aesthetics. In the course of a visit to the Museum with

James Jenkins on August 12th, the latter surprises Revel by his penetration:

> "me faisant remarquer un aspect essentiel des tapisseries auquel je n'avais pas pris garde, à savoir qu'elles ne sont pas des instantanés mais qu'elles représentent presque toutes des actions qui durent un certain temps, ce qui s'exprime par le fait que l'on peut voir, réunies dans la composition d'un seul panneau, plusieurs scènes en succession, le même personnage apparaissant ainsi deux fois, trois fois dans le numéro 15 ... ce qui s'exprime de façon encore plus frappante par le fait qu'une même figure peut y participer a des événements parfois évidemment séparés par plusieurs années, comme dans le numéro 1 'L'Enfance de Thésée' ... tableau qui jusqu'alors m'avait semblé le plus obscur de tous, mais dont il a su, lui, James Jenkins, me fournir un commentaire pour la première fois satisfaisant ... donnant son véritable rôle à cette figure de femme dans laquelle ce qui est fixé, ce n'est pas un instant seulement de sa course, mais toute une très longue histoire, toute une croissance, tout un très lent changement, à cette figure de femme, Ethra, dans la course de laquelle passent les années," (P. 310).

The tapestry depicting the childhood of Theseus is a reflection of Revel's description of his meal with Lucien at the Oriental Bamboo, which fixes not only that solitary occasion, but a whole succession of like meals, throughout his year in Bleston. Both sentence and tapestry mirror Butor's conception of *la durée*, which is also Bergson's, whose description of the present as "... une croissance par le dedans, le prolongement ininterrompu du passé dans un présent qui empiète sur l'avenir" so closely resembles Jenkins's interpretation of the manner in which Ethra is depicted, even to the use of the same word *croissance*.

[31] Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant, Oeuvres*, P. I3I2.

[32] The expressions " combler les vides," combler les lacunes are very frequently used by Butor to describe the function of art. See his observation that: " I have

a tendency to see my work as a filling of holes," quoted in the chapter dealing with criticism, and my discussion of the interpretation he puts on this.

Train of Thought

> "Civilisation is hooped together, brought
> Under a rule, under the semblance of peace
> By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
> And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
> Ravening through century after century,
> Ravening, raging and uprooting that he may come
> Into the desolation of reality:
> Egypt and Greece, goodbye, and good-bye, Rome!"
>
> Yeats

"Vous avez mis le pied gauche sur la rainure de cuivre, et de votre épaule droite vous essayez en vain de pousser un peu plus le panneau coulissant." Few readers were able to resist the mesmeric power of that opening sentence in 1957, when *La Modification*[1] appeared. It is no less compelling today, when one is approaching the novel for the third or fourth time. Although Butor's writing has continued to develop in a great variety of ways and to elicit a continually expanding body of criticism, *La Modification* has not ceased to interest critics. The only one of his books to be the subject of a full-length study, which appeared in 1970[2], it has since inspired two further monographs in 1972[3] and 1973[4] respectively, not to mention the articles devoted to it which continue to appear in scholarly journals. Winner of the *Prix Renaudot*, *La Modification* was also a popular success, indicating that it is "one of those rare works which are both supremely great and wholly accessible", in the words of Lord Clark.[5] That he was not speaking about Butor's novel, but about Michelangelo's *Creation of Man* on the

Sistine Ceiling, serves only to make the quotation all the more appropriate, since the role played by the great Renaissance artist (and by his works in the Sistine in particular) in *La Modification* is of the greatest importance.

When the book first came out, much was made of the use of the second person, which was indeed a new and brilliant idea. It added a new twist to the internal monologue, while avoiding the pit-fall of the omniscient narrator which the third person implies, and without recourse to the first person, the gambit customarily employed by novelists to this end, but which introduces limitations of its own, notably that it pushes the narrative into the past tense. From this point of view alone, *La Modification* is something of a *tour de force* but it is significant that the use of "vous" in this way has not been repeated, either by Butor or by anyone else. It appears that though it was an effective procedure, it could only be used once. It did not provide a permanent solution to the problems of narration and may even have indicated that no such solution is possible, at least in terms of the realistic novel.

One of the most important factors in Butor's use of *vous* is the unprecedented degree of identification with the novel's hero which it invites. No doubt this accounts in large measure for the book's popular success, but it also has important critical implications for the whole process of reading, and of novel-reading in particular, one of the major themes of *La Modification*.

Butor's third novel is the account of a train-journey from Paris to Rome made by the chief representative in Paris of the Italian firm of type-writer manufacturers, Scabelli. The nature of his job requires him to make the journey frequently for business reasons, but he is going to Rome on this particular occasion entirely on his own account. He wishes to tell his mistress, Cécile, that he has found her a job in Paris, that he intends finally to divorce his wife Henriette, and that they will start a new life together. In the course of his journey, however, assailed by memories and dreams, and increasingly tortured by self-doubt, Léon's fixity of purpose is gradually eroded, so that by the time he arrives at his destination he has reversed his decision and has instead made up his mind to spend the forthcoming three days in Rome alone, during which:

> "dans cette chambre, seul, vous commencerez à écrire un livre, pour combler le vide de ces jours à Rome sans Cécile, dans l'interdiction de l'approcher." (P. 228).

Quite apart from its literary merit, *La Modification* is a super-novel in that it unites so many of the major themes which have made the genre popular: escapism, the journey, the exotic appeal of foreign cities, the romance of trains and the chance encounters they facilitate, the classic trio, the whole rather tawdry dream of what is known as *l'aventure*. But this agglomeration was made with a critical intent: *La Modification* is a *critique du roman*.

Readers of *La Modification* have tended to fall into two clearly defined groups: those who read it for the story and are moved by its most precisely novelistic qualities, and those who see it rather as a brilliant intellectual exercise, a highly complex verbal construct which is directed more toward confronting the technical problems of novel-writing than to exposing and resolving the difficulties of Léon Delmont's rather banal situation. But this great novel is not simply either of these things; it is both, and to adopt one or other of the points of view I have described, exclusively, necessarily limits one's appreciation of its riches.

Thus those readers who in 1957 took *La Modification* at face value, sympathising in the fullest sense with Léon Delmont's predicament and succumbing completely to the hypnotic *vous* were not entirely wrong. By the very technical expertise of his novel, Butor had deliberately invited such a response. Indeed, in a sense, it is a necessary preliminary to a deeper appreciation of the work. What may have disappointed him, however, was the fact that in so many cases this initial response was not completed by the reflection on the relationship between life and art which the novel was intended to provoke, so that the moral implications of this profound and complex book were obscured.

By moral implications I do not mean Léon Delmont's decision to return to his wife. As Butor explains to Madelaine Chapsal:

> "Léon reste avec sa femme parce qu'il se rend compte que les relations dont il rêvait avec Cécile ne permettraient pas une évasion réelle; ça ne marcherait pas ... Que voulez-vous qu'il fasse d'autre? Ce n'est même pas qu'il n'aime plus Cécile, c'est que cette aventure lui apparaît comme une rue absolument barrée."

The morality of *La Modification* goes much deeper than a respect for *les bienséances*. Butor goes on to say:

> "Ce qu'un homme comme Léon Delmont cherche à travers l'amour de Cécile, il a raison de le chercher mais il ne l'obtiendra pas.
>
> D'ailleurs il s'en rend très bien compte, et c'est ce qui est tellement sinistre. Etant donnée sa situation, étant donné qui il est, le métier qu'il fait, les relations qu'il a, la place où il se trouve, eh bien, pour lui, tout est perdu. Il est condamné à l'impasse. Damnée si vous voulez."

The word *damnée* here must be interpreted in the strongest sense, given that the novel, to use a phrase applied by Cécile, in exasperation, to Léon himself, is "pourri de christianisme". Not only because it centres on Rome, the capital of the Christian world, but because of its continuous reference to two of the greatest artists of Christendom, Dante and Michelangelo. This pervasive Christian aura also manifests itself in the fact that the book Léon will write is in Butor's eyes an instrument of salvation: the only one that is open to him:

> "C'est la seule solution qui lui permettra de continuer à vivre d'une façon aussi raisonnable que possible. Destiné à disparaître, Léon se sauve par le biais de l'oeuvre d'art. Si pour lui les issues sont bouchées elles ne le sont pas forcément pour tous, et d'autres, ses enfants, seront d'autant moins condamnés qu'il leur aura montré pourquoi il l'est. Il va mettre sa vie entière au service d'une transformation de la réalité qui lui-même ne verra pas; mais il peut en profiter-par l'intermédiaire de sa certitude que ce qu'il fait va dans un certain sens." (Chapsal, 60).[7]

I am not suggesting that *La Modification* is a kind of tract extolling orthodox Christianity, but rather that it is permeated by Christian values, even if these are no longer guaranteed by dogma. The cultural influence of the church persists in our society, *en filigrane*, as it were. We are the heirs, if only the bankrupt heirs, of Christianity.

"C'est toujours à la mort que sont confrontés les héros de Butor," Jean Roudaut has written. This is particularly true of Léon Delmont, whose journey of initiation passes through the underworld and incorporates a Last Judgment before coming to an end at the Stazione Termini, whose name derives from that of the old Roman god of boundaries, Terminus, also the god of death, "from whose bourne no traveller returns." His presence as the tutelary deity of the entrance to modern Rome, together with the litany of other antique gods that occurs toward the end of the book, is one of several indications that religions other than Christianity have also left their residue in Western consciousness. The power of Rome as a symbol is derived not only from the fact that it unites the Empire and the Papacy, but the three great Religious currents of the West as well: Paganism, Christianity and Jewry. Bound for such a destination, it is hardly surprising that the minutely accurate realism of the description of Léon's train journey from Paris to Rome is underwritten by a deep spiritual significance. What is at stake is not whether he will forsake his wife for his mistress, but whether he will save his soul. That is the moral issue in *La Modification*. The fact that he will do so, as we are led to believe, through art, and by that same means bring about the salvation of others, firmly establishes the artist as hero and saviour of humanity, a role which is played to the limit by Pierre Vernier in the novel that follows *La Modification: Degrés*.

The heroic aspect of *La Modification*, though central to the book, represents only one strand in its richly woven tapestry. A study of this length cannot hope to separate out and examine each of these, but before making the choice which imposes itself, the remarkable cohesiveness of the book must be emphasised. There is a perfect marriage of realism and symbolism throughout, so that the railway journey not only mirrors the spiritual one, but is generative of it. That is to say that the technical and physical aspects of travel by train provide the stimulus for Léon's dream, at least on the conscious level. An analysis of the dream and its genesis bears this out, indicating that its existence is "toute ferroviaire", just like the town of Laroche-Migennes (P. 39), where, appropriately, the first significant stimulus of the dream is introduced.

"La plaque tournante du rêve donne sur tant de voies."

Butor

This sentence which occurs in *Histoire Extraordinaire*, where it is applied to Baudelaire's dream, is so appropriate to *La Modification* that it seems as if the novel must have been present to Butor's mind, at least sub-consciously, when he wrote it. Not only does it point up the multivalence of dream imagery, but by virtue of its unusual metaphor, it links dreaming with railways.

There is no doubt about the variety of tracks to which the turn-table of Léon Delmont's dream gives access. Only one of them can be pursued here, however, that which leads to the underworld and to the central episode of the dream: the consultation with the sibyl:

> "Et voici que dans la subconscience du voyageur à demi-sommeillant, le tunnel du chemin de fer se métamorphose en la caverne de la Sibylle de Cûmes, évoquant la quête du rameau d'or et la descente dans l'au-delà."[8]

In his article "Michel Butor et le 'nouveau roman'", Pierre Deguise, having commented on the role played by legend in *La Modification*, points out that in the context of the train journey from Paris to Rome (itself symbolic of the hero's journey toward self-discovery) trivial incidents assume a higher significance. He sites the example of the railway tunnel which, in Léon Delmont's subconscious, becomes the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl, and in doing so draws our attention to an important instance of the interlocking of the physical journey with the spiritual one. He does not, however, raise the question of why Léon's choice of oracle should fall on the Cumaean Sibyl in particular, though it is an interesting one, and it is my purpose to show that the choice of the Cumaean Sibyl is not arbitraty but deliberate and significant, and that what I will call the sibyl episode and its genesis are a great deal more closely woven into the fabric of *La Modification* than a first reading (even a careful one) would indicate.

This raises the question of how carefully, in fact, we read any work of fiction; Butor himself, in a critical essay, poses the problem thus: "Ce qu'il s'agit de savoir, bien sûr, c'est ce que l'on entend au juste lorsqu'on emploie le verbe lire" (R 1, 219-220). In his opinion, a complete reading is an illusion, and in fact:

> "nous ne réussissons jamais à lire aussi intégralement que nous l'imaginons, passant souvent des lignes, oubliant des lettres, prenant un mot pour un autre, et devinant le sens de ceux que nous ne connaissons pas, sans prendre la peine, la plupart du temps de le vérifier."

On reflection most of us would admit the truth of this, and it follows that the writer, in seeking to produce his effects, must take our careless reading habits into account. He must deploy his significant information with great care, repeating himself, weaving the same thread into his tapestry at calculated intervals, so that eventually the reader must catch a glimpse of the pattern, must become at least subconsciously aware of it, even if he never manages to analyse it in the manner of the literary critic. The analogy between this technique and musical composition is striking and Butor has several times remarked on the close relationship which exists between the novel, with its "valeur privilégiée dans l'exploration temporelle" (R 2, 42) and music, another art-form "se déployant avant tout dans le temps." They are both time-arts in that they are both concerned with a sequence in time. In the novel the fiction is inseparable from the narration; the novelist must be concerned with the happening and not only with the outcome. Similarly, a piece of music *is* the exposition and development of certain themes and a satisfactory work which would consist only of a finale is inconceivable. Furthermore, both novelist and composer demand that their audience suspend their habitual time for the duration of their reading or listening. The novel also resembles music in its formalism - an element to which Butor attaches great importance, since it is by the use of:

> "des formes suffisamment fortes, comparables à des structures mathématiques ou musicales, faisant jouer systématiquement les éléments les uns par rapport aux autres" (R 1, 271),

that the novel can invest even the most banal descriptions with the power of poetry.

The sibyl episode in *La Modification* is a case in point and the poetic transformation of the passage of a train through a tunnel is largely due to the manipulation of such "formes suffisamment fortes". A study of the episode is thus very revealing of Butor's method of composition in the fullest sense.

It is important to recall that Léon Delmont's descent to the underworld takes place in a dream, and following the Freudian theory that dreams have their origins in the events of the "dream day", Butor is at pains to provide Léon with the actual incidents in his waking hours which will later inspire the surreal but tightly knit structures of his dream. The theme of the sibyl is first introduced in the guise of a loud-speaker which is braying unintelligibly when the train stops at Laroch-Migennes. "Alors une bouffée d'air frais entre dans le compartiment et l'on extend la voix rauque d'un haut-parleur qui profère des syllabes méconnaissables..." (P. 40). The multivalent possibilities of this disembodied voice are traditional attributes of the sibyl, while it was also her task to advise people on the direction that their lives ought to take. The analogy with station loud-speakers is unmistakable. Nor should the play on words *(syllabes, sibylle)* be ignored, given Butor's evident delight in verbal exercises of this kind.[9] As the train journey progresses, further references are made to the loud-speakers at various stations and with the crossing of the Alps the motif of the tunnel comes into prominence. Incidentally, the underlying geographical necessity of this is a good example of how Butor establishes the connexion between the physical world and the world of imagination and dreams, which far from being mutually exclusive, must both be taken into account if reality is successfully to be conveyed.

Tunnels are mentioned four times in the course of pages 130 to 131: "Voici que passe un court tunnel", "Voici que passe un autre tunnel un peu plus long", "Voici que passe encore un tunnel, le lampadaire du plafond s'allume", "Il n'y a plus de paysage, il y a les vitres qui deviennent noires avec des reflets ..., puis blanches comme de la neige". The progressively longer sentences mirror the increasing length of the tunnels they describe. One feels the train penetrating ever deeper into the mountains and the fact that "le lampadaire s'allume" in readiness for longer spells of darkness fortifies the illusion. By these means the phenomenon of the tunnel is established in the consciousness of both Léon and the reader preparatory to its transformation into the sibyl's cave.

On page 142 we read that:

> "L'employé du wagon-restaurant, agitant sa cloche, croise une femme en robe noire, une italienne au dos voûté comme une maigre sibylle de Cûmes."

Four lines further on: "Le train entre dans un tunnel et son bruit s'enfonce." Thus the two images, that of the old woman who reminds him of the Cumaean Sibyl and that of the tunnel are superimposed on Léon's mind and the noise of the train in the tunnel is suggestive of the sibyl's voice echoing within the walls of her cave.

The journey continues, people enter and leave the compartment, Léon arrives at a point in his meditations where he no longer knows why he is on the train. Serious doubts about bringing Cécile to Paris assail him but he is not yet ready to face the situation squarely. "Il ne faut pas y penser", he prevaricates, "Il faut laisser les choses se faire toutes seules ... Il faut fixer les yeux sur ces deux jeunes gens qui viennent de dîner, qui ont la chaleur du vin et du repas sur leur visage, qui se sont repris par la main" (P. 157). But the contemplation of the young couple only serves to remind him of the failure of his own marriage, of the apparently inevitable failure of love, which they too must one day suffer. At this point his train of thought is interrupted by the entrance of "un vieil homme avec une longue barbe blanche comme Zacharie ... suive d'une vieille femme avec un nez un peu crochu comme la sibylle persique" (P. 158). Here a variation on the sibyl theme is introduced since it is now the Persian Sibyl who is invoked. Furthermore, she is accompanied by an old man who looks like a Hebrew prophet. Though superficially perhaps an ill-assorted pair, the man associated with the Old Testament, the woman with the Pagan world, they are yet well-matched in that both resemble sooth-sayers. More importantly a careful examination of the text reveals that the appearance of the old man has been just as thoughtfully prepared as that of his companion.

Throughout the book frequent mention is made of a man who opens the door of the compartment, scans the interior as if looking for someone and then goes away. He is simply described as "un homme" until page 124 when he is more precisely defined as: "un vieil italien avec une longue barbe blanche". By page 152 he has become: "Un homme dans la porte, un vieillard [qui] regarde à droite et à gauche, détournant violemment sa tête, barbue comme Ezéchiel".

On page 158 the old man "avec une longue barbe blanche" enters with his sibylline wife.

The old people fit very well into Léon's musings on the vicissitudes of "le couple" generally and from this point of view their introduction is aesthetically justified but in their personae of prophet and sibyl they are invested with a higher significance and their mildly eccentric behaviour (which, in his tense emotional state Léon interprets as being inimical to him) is appropriate to their symbolic role.

Thus Butor prepares Léon's dream on the conscious level. It grows naturally, not only out of the dreamer's mental state but out of his physical surroundings. It is inspired by such mundane things as loud-speakers, railway tunnels, old women of vaguely sinister aspect and patriarchal old men. Not only does this procedure coincide with an accepted theory of the source of dreams but it is also a good example of that manipulation of "des formes suffisamment fortes" by which the commonplace is given poetic force.

However, external stimuli are not the only sources of Léon's dream. It is rooted in his mental state and it is fed by memories. Léon's mental state is one of anguish and confusion. Temporarily and unusually freed from the routine of the Scabelli organization he is forced into examining his situation dispassionately:

> "... ouvrant ainsi la porte à tous ces souvenirs anciens que vous aviez si bien oubliés, remisés, dont quelque chose en vous (le peut-on appeler vous-même, puisque vous n'y pensiez point) mais dont ce quelque chose en vous qui justement réglait ce à quoi vous pensiez vous imaginait si bien protégé." (P. 175).

The unusual circumstances of his journey, his escape from routine, have raised "la trappe qui les [les souvenirs] maintenait dans le sous-sol de la conscience". The phrase is Bergson's and the parallel with Bergson's theory of the interpretation of dreams is striking.

As a corollary to his theory of the cone of memory Bergson believed that it suffices for us to be removed from the absorbing activities of daily life (as in sleep) for all the phantom memories which have been imprisoned in the unconscious to seek release. They are far too many (since according to Bergson we forget nothing) for all of them to succeed and so a choice imposes itself. Among the memories:

> "... qui aspirent à se lester de couleur, de sonorité, de matérialité enfin, ceux-là seuls y réussiront qui pourront s'assimiler la poussière coloréé que j'aperçois, les bruits du dehors et du dedans que j'entends, etc., et qui de plus s'harmoniseront avec l'état affectif général que mes impressions organiques composent. Quand cette jonction s'opérera entre le souvenir et la sensation, j'aurai un rêve."[10]

These remarks are strikingly apposite not only to the dream which occurs in Léon's sleep, but also to his entire mental activity during the journey in so far as the latter is what Butor would call "un rêve éveillé". This particular journey departs from the norm in that it has no connexion with the Scabelli firm and Léon is not therefore preoccupied with business matters. Although he is conscious for long intervals on the train, his role is an entirely passive one as far as physical activity is concerned. He has only to sit in his carriage and he will be brought to his destination. He is virtually in a state of suspended animation, and even before he falls asleep he is assailed by memories: memories which assimilate very well with his external and internal sensations (since the majority of them are concerned with similar journeys) and which respond to the affective tone of his general sensibility since he is preoccupied with winning his true love, and the trip from Paris to Rome is closely linked with both his wife and his mistress. Each of the episodes in which he recalls (at the prompting of his present journey) the events of former journeys from Paris to Rome and vice versa, could in fact be called dreams in the Bergsonian sense, since they are all the fruit of the union between memory and sensation. But Bergson's remarks are no less relevant to Léon's "real" dream, which inserts itself piecemeal into the fabric of the day-dreams so that it is quite difficult at times to distinguish one from the other. The subconscious roots of the dream - the memories themselves - must now be examined.

Léon Delmont's passionate love for Rome, one of the major themes of *La Modification*, is reflected in his lovingly gathered "Roman" library, which includes both the Aeneid in the Guillaume Budé edition and the letters of Julian the Apostate.[11] He is familiar with Aeneas's descent to the underworld and at a particular point in the novel he reads the sixth book of the Aeneid in which this incident is described. The connexion between Julian's letters and the sibyl is less obvious but also significant, since it was Julian who ordered the last recorded consultation of the Sibylline Books in A.D. 363. Furthermore, in his sixth Oration, addressed to the Uneducated Cynics, he discusses at length the pronouncement of the Pythian Oracle - "Know thyself" - insisting that self-knowledge must be the basis of all wisdom - a notion that is relevant to Léon's quest for authenticity generally and to his exchanges with the Cumaean Sibyl in particular.[12]

Thus the scope of Léon's reading and his love for Rome unite in establishing a precedent for oracular consultation. It is natural for him to consult the Cumaean Sibyl in his dream when he needs advice. This was her function in antiquity. The city of Rome consulted her books by order of the Senate in times of emergency. So did Julian the Apostate. Most importantly Aeneas, on the threshold, so to speak, of Rome, the city it was his mission to found, learned from her the future of his city and his race. In so far as Rome represents for Léon too "le lieu de l'authenticité" it is entirely fitting that he should follow in Aeneas's footsteps. The memory of the sibyl is therefore released from his unconscious when, himself desperately in need of advice, and on his way to Rome, he sees in rapid succession two old ladies whose appearance strikes him at once as sibylline.

But if this accounts for the presence of the Cumaean Sibyl in Léon's mental baggage, the reference to the Persian Sibyl remains unexplained, and what of her companion, the old man like Zachary? Furthermore, how did Léon know that the old ladies resembled the Cumaean and Persian Sibyls respectively? Apart from their common old age each is distinguished by a single physical characteristic - in the case of the Cumaea "un dos voûté", for the Persica "un nez un peu crochu". To what image of these ladies does Léon refer?

Now although he pursues his dream of Rome through literature, Léon seeks it even more single-mindedly through art. Cécile and he spend most of their brief days together on pilgrimages to the great artistic monuments of the city. Indeed Léon is finally forced to admit that he loves Cécile only in the measure that she is his guide to Rome (P. 198). Cécile knows and loves Rome and seeks consciously or otherwise to cement her place in Léon's affections by revealing to him the wonders of the Eternal City, with, however, one notable exception. She refuses adamantly to set foot in the Vatican, and thus the great work of Michelangelo - the Sistine Chapel - is denied them. Having devoted weekends to Borromini and Piranesi, among other artists, they make an abortive attempt at a weekend under the aegis of Michelangelo, and do indeed go to see the statue of Moses in the church of Saint Peter in Chains. But the whole day is overshadowed by their acute consciousness of the Sistine Chapel which they will not see and they are "...hantés tous les deux par ces prophètes et ces sibylles, par ce jugement absent" (P. 144). With these words the primary source of the prophet and sibyl figures becomes clear and we realize that Léon's dream, though partly the result of literary memories, is more specifically prompted by his recollection of the Sistine ceiling, where the finest examples of sibyls in art are depicted on five of the twelve pendentives, the other seven being filled with as many prophets. Both the Cumaean and Persian Sibyls are there as are Ezechiel and Zachariah. The Cumaea is depicted "au dos voûté" and she is of Junoesque proportions. Léon is careful to describe the woman in the corridor as being like "une maigre sibylle de Cûmes" and the distinction would be redundant were there not present in his mind the image of a large woman. Michelangelo's Persica is seated in such an attitude that it is difficult to be sure about the shape of her nose (her face is almost entirely averted) but it could reasonably be called "un peu crochu".

Although Cécile will not set foot there, Léon has visited the Sistine alone and with his wife, Henriette, and it is the memory of Michelangelo's frescoes that surges up from his subconscious at the crucial moment when he is required to make a judgment: a judgment which, no less than the one which haunted them in San Pietro in Vincoli, has begun to haunt his entire relationship with Cécile and in precisely the same manner - by its absence. He has shirked the choice between his wife and his mistress, he has vacillated between his Roman and his Parisian persona but the moment of truth has at last come, provoked by his impulsive journey.

The absent judgment weighs heavily on Cécile and Léon for a variety of reasons. In the first place it carries implications of the judgment of God and of the Catholic Church, and in the course of one passionate anti-Catholic outburst Cécile cries out against the religion which, she says, has already deprived her of much "et qui maintenant me prive de toi" (P. 140). Léon is further oppressed by his consciousness of the absent and implacable judgment of his wife which extends beyond the context of his illicit relations with Cécile to embrace his betrayal of all the ideals they shared when they were first married. It is important too that Aeneas received the Golden Bough and succeeded at last in founding Rome on account of his *pietas*, a virtue in which Léon has been found wanting. In pursuit at last of authenticity, however, his surroundings, the incidents of his journey and his travelling companions assume for him a higher significance, as Deguise has justly remarked, but the full meaning of the sibyl episode in *La Modification* is revealed when we realize that it is rooted in the subconscious memory of the Sistine Chapel which has assumed a powerful significance in Léon's life.[13]

An examination of the dream itself will reveal further evidence in support of this theory of its genesis. I will confine the discussion, however, to those sequences which are directly relevant to the sibyl episode.

In the first sequence of the dream Léon descends to the underworld in the footsteps of Aeneas and stumbles into the sibyl's cave. The old woman appears to be seated in the same attitude as Michelangelo's Cumaea. She is reading from a large book and does not turn her head to speak to

Léon, suggesting that she presents herself to him in profile, as she does on the Sistine ceiling. Remembering his Virgil, Léon inquires if he is to be given the Golden Bough that served Aeneas as guide, but he is told that the Golden Bough is not for such as him "qui sont aussi étrangers à leurs désirs" (P. 180) - a remark which recalls the pronouncement of the Pythian Oracle and Julian the Apostate's Oration on the subject. The phrase also suggests a comparison of Aeneas's undeviating sense of duty with the authenticity which Léon has so far failed to achieve.

Armed with only two small burned cakes, a meagre viaticum, Léon makes his way to the banks of the Styx to await the arrival of Charon's ferry. Charon's appearance recalls the "portitur horrendus" of Virgil, with his eyes of flame, but he resembles Michelangelo's Charon (in the Last Judgment) even more - "debout armé d'une rame qu'il tient levée sur son épaule comme prêt à frapper" (P. 183).[14] Léon is conveyed across the Styx in a shower of scraps of paper:

> "La pluie de bribes de papier continue, semblables à des pétales ou des feuilles mortes, se déposant à la surface de l'eau qu'elles recouvrent presque, lui donnant l'aspect d'une peinture qui s'écaille" (P. 187).

This curious rain and the images which it evokes are alike worthy of comment. The rain is doubtless the result of

Léon's having observed Madame Polliat throwing papers from the carriage window, an incident which may have reminded him of Virgil's description of the flying leaves on which the wisdom of the sibyl was inscribed. There is a connexion too between the shower of paper and the snow which is falling as the train crosses the Alps, and which clings to the shoulders of the Customs officials who board the train at the frontier. But sibyl, snow and flying leaves are all to be found in Dante's memorable lines:

> "cosí la neve al sol si disigilla;
> cosí al vento ne le foglie lievi
> si perdea la sentenza di Sibi~~ll~~a,"[15]

and the echo of the Divine Comedy in this passage of *La Modification* is too clear to be fortuitous.

Léon, in his dream, has crossed the Styx, and recovering from a kind of stupor, he enters Rome, which he has discovered to be near by. After causing a minor scandal by hurling a glass of wine at a brick wall, he is arrested. He then finds himself detained in a building which he identifies positively as the underground portion of Nero's Domus Aurea. However, the vaulted roof and the niches along the walls in which his guards are seated are strongly suggestive of the architectural structure of the Sistine Chapel, and one of the guards enters "cachant son visage sous son avant-bras", the gesture of one of the damned in the Last Judgment (P. 210). As the dream progresses the conviction that Léon is in the Sistine gathers strength and his earlier assertion that he is in the Domus Aurea is probably an example of those topographical aberrations with which all dreamers are familiar.

Presently Léon feels himself float gradually upwards until he is at eye-level with the figures seated along the walls and he continues to float slowly along under the vaulted roof until he is confronted with a mural of the Deluge (one of the "histories" depicted on the Sistine ceiling). This picture fades into a vision of Christ in the role of Judge, who tells Léon: "'Ce n'est pas moi qui te condamne, ce sont tous ceux qui m'accompagnent et leurs ancêtres, ce sont tous ceux qui t'accompagnent et leurs enfants'" (P. 217). These words recall Léon's uneasiness under the gaze of "Zacharie" and his companion, his consciousness of Henriette's unremitting judgment of him and the anger and humiliation he felt during the dinner which preceded his departure when his children "n'ont cessé de ricaner dans leurs assiettes" (P. 33). The vision of Christ dissolves and with the next sequence of Léon's dream the huge figures seated around the walls are referred to as "les immenses prophètes et sibylles" (P. 221). But now the end wall of the building cracks and crumbles in great slabs:

> "Le mur du fond tombait par grandes plaques
> et la figure centrale se teignait de bleu,
> se fondait dans la lumière épaisse, formant
> comme un caillot au milieu du paysage urbain
> nocturne qui se découvrait peu à peu" (P. 219).

Thus the image of "la peinture qui s'écaille" recurs and is linked with that blue which is so remarkable a feature of the Last Judgment but is also an obsessional feature of Léon's journey, in the guise of "la veilleuse" which he finds so disturbing. Bathed in crude daylight, the everyday objects surrounding him keep awkward questions at bay, prevent the crack-up of his elaborate carapace of self-deception; but in the blue glow of the "veilleuse" everything is open to question and the imperative "Know thyself" will not be denied. The dream and Léon's journey, the spiritual and the physical progress toward Rome are drawing to a close.

The concept of Rome as the *caput mundi* not only of the Roman Empire but of Christendom is central to *La Modification*. The Popes, successors to the Emperors, spread another version of the Pax Romana throughout Europe. Butor's treatment of Rome is strongly reminiscent of Dante's, for whom Rome was a multivalent symbol, but who insisted particularly on the fusion of Aeneas's *alma Roma* with Peter's See.[16] The connexion between Pagan and Christian Rome haunts Léon also and he is finally not prepared to accept Cécile's rejection of the Vatican ("cette poche de pus stupidement doré), as she calls it (P. 139), and all that her rejection implies. He is aware, of course, that her attitude is not due simply to anti-Catholic feeling. She knows intuitively that the Vatican represents everything which prevents Léon from leaving Henriette and starting a new life. The negative power of the church frightens her the more because she herself is not entirely free from the dread of its strictures and Léon knows that she will not allow him even to speak of the Vatican "par peur de la contagion, par superstition toute romaine" (P. 139). Yet Léon realizes now the futility of trying to flee the vestiges of "ce monde en train de s'écrouler", Catholicism, "dans sa capitale elle-même".

Although he claims to have loved Cécile the more for her hatred of popery, Léon visited the Vatican with Henriette when they were on their honeymoon. They seem to have regarded it as simply another aspect of Rome and were not in any way overawed by its significance, neither of them expressing any desire to see the Pope and "s'esclaffant devant les bondieuseries des boutiques" (P. 235).

However, on their second visit, Henriette "voulait à tout prix voir le Pape" (P. 124) and she returned from her audience transfigured in a rather disturbing way. "Quand elle est revenue, elle était toute mal à l'aise mais ses yeux brillaient d'une sorte de fanatisme" (P. 124). But her desire to see the Pope seems to have been inspired by Léon's failure to introduce her to *his* Rome, "le lieu de l'authenticité". In her disappointment, she turns to the Vatican for reassurance. A rift has already opened between Léon and herself. As his bogus job leads Léon into increasingly shameful self-betrayal, Henriette, whom he makes his excuse, but who is also his unrelenting judge, grows more distasteful to him. Knowing that Rome represented for her husband "le lieu de l'authenticité", Henriette set great store by their return visit, hoping to rediscover the man with whom she had fallen in love. Her disappointment is all the keener when she finds he cannot share his dreams with her. She seeks to give Rome meaning by interpreting it as the centre of Christianity and falls into an error which is equivalent to, while being the reverse of, Cécile's. The ambivalent nature of Rome as the capital of Pagan and Christian world alike is lost on both of them.

But neither the Pagan nor the Christian organization of the world is any longer adequate to the needs of men. "Le souvenir de l'Empire", which for so long exerted such a powerful influence on European minds, "est maintenant une figure insuffisante pour désigner l'avenir de ce monde" (P. 231). "Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold", yet Léon keenly feels the desire for a centre, for "une organisation impériale du monde autour d'une ville capitale" (P. 231). The fault in Léon's own personality is obscurely connected with the historical fissure which splits the world. Paris represents the real - in the sense of "le quotidien" - Rome the ideal. Léon's attempt to superimpose one on the other is doomed to failure. All that can be expected is that they be maintained in communication with each other. Cécile represents the ideal too - a liberation from the narrow life with Henriette who has become her husband's scape-goat. But by her refusal to recognize one aspect of Rome's ambivalent nature, Cécile becomes inadequate to represent the complete Rome, and the liberation she offers becomes merely an escape, a lie. She brings no true "renovatio"[17] such as transfigures the faces of the prophets on the Sistine ceiling.

Léon will seek to shed some light on the enigma of Rome by writing his book. The link between it and the Sybilline books which contained the wisdom of the ages, and Mallarmé's book, which would explain the universe, is unmistakable.

Clearly, the Sistine Chapel has a very powerful hold on Léon Delmont's imagination. That it must have a somewhat similar effect on Butor is suggested not only by the fact that he accords such prominence to it and to the artist associated with it, Michelangelo, in the novel, but also by the extraordinary way in which the entire structure of *La Modification* reflects that of the Sistine. A detailed analysis of this aspect of the work would provide material for a separate study, of which the sibyl episode may be taken as a scale model. Broadly speaking, such a study would hinge on the following points.[18]

The dominant architectural feature of the Sistine when Michelangelo was commissioned to paint the ceiling was its barrel-vaulted roof. One of the major triumphs of the finished work is the manner in which the artist turned this feature to his advantage, seeming to draw his great panorama out of the existing form of the ceiling. Thus the seated figures of the sibyls and prophets seem to hold down the weight of the vault, while the attitude of the prophet Jonah, over the altar, while perfectly appropriate iconographically and artistically, was also devised as a means of dealing with a slight convexity in the wall. This is typical of Michelangelo's method as a sculptor also. The figures known as the Prisoners show how he drew his sculptured forms out of the stone, and he believed that the essence of sculpture was to cut away the unnecessary surplus so that the form dormant within the block was revealed. There is a parallel here with the manner in which Butor draws a work of art from the railway itinerary between Paris and Rome, and with the stripping away of Léon's illusions.

Structurally, the railway carriage resembles the Sistine, in that it too has a vaulted roof, albeit of a rudimentary kind, as do railway tunnels, whose very essence is that they are vaulted and which play such a significant role in the novel. The vaulted roof is also mentioned specifically in Léon's dream.

The manner in which the passengers sit around the walls of the compartment is also reminiscent of the Sistine. Apart from the two who are specifically identified with a sibyl and a prophet, several of the others could be cast in the same roles, when one considers the different attitudes they adopt: now ruminating on their private thoughts, now "plongés dans la lecture". The young couple, Pierre and Agnés, might even be taken to represent Adam and Eve before the Fall. Léon himself could well be the archetypal exile, Adam expelled from Paradise, so poignantly portrayed by Michelangelo as having changed utterly since the moment of his creation. The young woman who slumps toward Léon in her sleep exactly reproduces the attitude of one of the figures in the Spandrels in the chapel, and there may be a punning reference to another architectural feature in the mention that is made of Zacharie's spectacles, or *lunettes*.[19]

But perhaps most significant of all is the idea expressed in one of Michelangelo's most beautiful sonnets, which Erwin Panofsky paraphrases as follows:

> "Potentially the block of stone contains any figure that the artist can think of, and it depends only on his skill as a sculptor what manner of figure comes into being; in a similar way, evil, as well as the greatest bliss, death as well as compassion is present in the beloved's heart, and it is only due to the lover's poor skill in practicing the art of love if death instead of compassion is brought forth."[20]

This is so appropriate to Léon's experience with both his wife and his mistress that it is difficult to believe that the connection is fortuitous.

Finally, Michelangelo's constant preoccupation with death, which reaches its apothesis in the Last Judgment, has its parallel in Léon's preoccupation with advancing age; and the progress of Butor's hero (or anti-hero) under a vaulted roof, toward the Stazione Termini, ending in a dream confrontation with Christ the Judge, is in a sense, a mirror image of a progression from the entrance to the altar wall of the Sistine.

The influence the Sistine exerts on Léon's subconscious is a reflection of its structural importance in *La Modification*, but it is also due to the impact it has had on him as a work of art. Some of the reasons for this are implicit in the foregoing discussion of his dream. As perhaps the best known work of art in the Vatican (at least to Catholic pilgrims) it represents the remnants of the faith he cannot quite discard; it is associated with his honeymoon in Rome and equally with Cécile, though in a negative way. But perhaps even more important is the fact that in the persons of the prophets and sibyls, the Sistine unites the pagan and Christian worlds; while the histories depicted on the ceiling represent Jahweh, the God of the Old Testament; the lunettes and spandrels the history of the Jewish people before the coming of the Messiah; and the altar wall Christ himself in the awe and majesty of the Second Coming. It is therefore a powerful symbol of what Rome itself represents. The fact that it is absent from the novel in the sense that it is nowhere specifically described makes it one of the first instances of one of the *images absentes*, which have since become such a feature of Butor's work. In a sense *La Modification* is the *Illustration* of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel.

Then again, Man, as depicted on the Sistine Ceiling, is of heroic stature. At the moment of his creation, reclining like one of the ancient river-gods, Adam, with his noble features and superb body, epitomises everything Léon would like to be. The impasse that he finds himself in results from the fact that he wishes, though in a typically ineffectual way, to be a hero in an unheroic age.[21] This is intimately connected with his fixation on Rome. He sees himself as a latter-day Aeneas, with Cécile as his Dido ("cette magicienne qui par la grâce d'un seul de ses regards vous délivre de toute cette horrible caricature d'existence.") (P. 35); under the benevolent protection of Venus (represented in the novel by the evening star and the Temple of Venus and Rome); destined to establish a new *caput mundi*: "le lieu de l'authenticité." But the times are out of joint and anyway he is not of a heroic temper. In the course of his journey the hour comes for him to "wither into the truth" and to make the only heroic gesture open to him, to record his illusion and disillusion that others may profit by his experience, to escape from "le fade enfer" (P. 23) "par le biais de l'oeuvre d'art."

What might be called Léon's "Romisme" could be considered as a variant of the condition known as "Bovarysme" and it has its origins in the same activity: reading.

"They say life's the thing; but I prefer reading."

Logan Pearsall Smith

The number and frequency of references to books and reading in *La Modification* is remarkable. As Jean Roudaut observes:

> "Les personnages ont ainsi un attribut ... le prêtre son bréviaire; les jeunes mariés le guide bleu et l'Assimil d'italien ... le représentant de commerce, un hebdomadaire de cinema; le professeur de droit, des livres rélies en une toile sêche."[22]

In addition there is "le guide bleu des égarés" vainly sought by Léon in his dream, the books and scrolls consulted by the prophets and sibyls, the book read by Cécile on the return journey from her ill-fated sojourn in Paris with Léon, the Letters of Julian the Apostate, the Sixth Book of the Aeneid and finally "le livre non lu", the novel Léon buys at the Gare de Lyon and uses to mark his place in the compartment whenever he goes outside: "le roman inutilisé" (P. 131).

All these books are consulted like oracles, while at the same time offering an escape from the readers' immediate surroundings. Absorbed in their reading, all seek some kind of guidance, even if it is of a purely practical nature, and more often than not, they hope to come across a situation sufficiently similar to their own to allow them to identify with it, but in a higher key, as it were, so that they can enjoy the pleasure coveted by Roquentin: to be "heureux comme un héros de roman." The novel Léon buys is "inutilisé" because it serves none of these purposes; particularly, it is not allowed to provide an escape route. Léon's meditations on his reasons for not having read it are a very important commentary on the use to which books are commonly put. Why not have read it, he asks himself, since, by the mere fact of its being a novel, it would be bound to have people in it who resembled, more or less, his companions on the journey, even someone whose situation vaguely resembled his own? But he has not read the book, bought with the intention of distracting himself:

> "justement parce que pendant ce voyage-ci vous désiriez pour une fois être vous-même en totalité dans votre acte, et que, s'il avait pu vous intéresser suffisamment dans ces circonstances, ç'aurait été qu'il se serait trouvé dans une conformité telle avec votre situation qu'il vous aurait exposé à vous-même votre problème et que par conséquent bien loin de vous distraire, bien loin de vous protéger contre cette désintégration de votre projet, de vos beaux espoirs, il n'aurait pu que précipiter les choses," (P. 166).

Clearly, then, reading is a double-edged activity, and books may either distract or concentrate the mind. There seems no doubt that the book Léon will write will fall into the latter category, nor that it is the one which finds favour with Butor. The phrase "plongé dans un livre" is repeated over and over again in *La Modification*. The abstraction from the surrounding milieu that this implies is not necessarily a bad thing; one may meet oneself in the process. But it is essential that this "rêve éveillé" lead to an awakening into the truth, and this is portrayed in the attitudes of the prophets and sibyls on the Sistine ceiling. If one accepts the interpretation that their acuity of vision increases as one approaches the altar, the Delphic Sibyl and Ezekiel, among the most inspired, have turned away from their scrolls. Zachariah (over the entrance), however, and the Persian Sibyl, whose inspiration is weakest, are immersed in their books, heads averted from the great events which are taking place above them.

The pernicious side of reading is manifested in *La Modification* by the mythology of "l'aventure". This is what Léon seeks with Cécile, the romantic ideal in the fullest sense of the word romantic, spawned by novels, the delusion which ruined Emma Bovary. By the magic of "l'aventure", he believes, he will retrieve his lost hopes and ideals, disengage his real self from the *gangue* of years of lies and self-deceit. He will become a hero. It is a telling comment on Léon and on the society to which he belongs, that the heroic ideal is reduced to the status of an extra-marital affair, which he does not even have the courage to pursue to its conclusion.

Léon's willingness to take on the truly heroic burden of the artist, at the end of the novel, is a measure of the transformation he has undergone.

Thus *La Modification* is a *critique du roman* on moral as well as on technical grounds, and hence inevitably, a *critique* of contemporary society as well. Complex and profound, "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, thus providing a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history,"[23] at once technically brilliant and deeply moving, *La Modification* is one of the great novels of the twentieth century.

[1] Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1957, rpt. Collection 10/18 Union Générale d'Editions, 1962. References in the text are to the Editions de Minuit edition.

[2] Françoise Van Rossum-Guyon, *Critique du roman: essai sur "La Modification" de Michel Butor*, Bibliothèque des Idées (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

[3] Bernard Lalande, *La Modification - Butor*, Profil d'une oeuvre 26 (Paris: Hatier, 1972).

[4] Patrice Quéréel, *La Modification de Butor*, Collection Poche Critique (Paris: Hachette, 1973).

[5] Kenneth Clark, "The Hero as Artist," *Civilisation* (London: B.B.C. and John Murray, 1969), p. 129.

[6] Madeleine Chapsal, pp. 59-60.

[7] The idea of salvation through writing in a Christian sense is movingly and somewhat surprisingly described in the last pages of Sartre's *Les Mots*, Collection Folio (Paris: Gallimard, 1964):

> "ma seule affaire était de me sauver ...
> par le travail et la foi." (P. 214).

[8] Pierre Deguise, "Michel Butor et 'le nouveau roman'," *The French Review* XXXV (December 1961), pp. 155, 162.

[9] For example, the pun on train on p. 120: "Et cette possibilité ... vous êtes en train de la réaliser." The expression also occurs on page 83: "ce vieil homme que vous êtes en train de devenir,"; on page 85: "ce qui est en train de se faire,"; on page 196: "en train de s'accomplir,"; and on page 205: "en train de continuer.". It is quite likely that Butor had the English expression "train of thought" in mind when writing *La Modification*.

[10] Henri Bergson, *L'Energie spirituelle: essais et conférences* (Paris, 1932), pp. 102-103.

[11] There is an extraordinary likeness between Léon's desire for Rome and Sigmund Freud's longing for the Eternal City, as expressed in his correspondence and pointed out by David Bakan in his book *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* (New York: 1958). Bakan associates this longing with the Messianic feeling he discerns in Freud and points out that "according to Jewish tradition, Rome is the legendary place of the Messiah, and the place where the Messiah will reveal himself." Freud makes several references to his emotional involvement with Rome in letters to his friend Fliess, and in one of the most significant instances he asserts that his longing for Rome is deeply neurotic, connected as it is with his youthful hero worship of Hannibal. "To my youthful mind" (he writes to Fliess) "Hannibal and Rome symbolised the conflict between the tenacity of Jewry and the organisation of the Catholic Church ... . Thus the wish to go to Rome had become in my dream life a cloak and a symbol for a number of other passionate wishes." And in another letter he writes: "'Learning the eternal laws of life in the Eternal City would be no bad combination.

On the whole I am further away from Rome than at any time since we met, and the freshness of youth is notably declining. The journey is long, the stations at which one can be thrown out are very numerous, and it is still a matter of 'if I can last out!'" Given the richness of Butor's culture and the elaborate manner in which his books are constructed, we must conclude that the link between Freud and Léon is intentional. It throws light on the idea of Rome in *La Modification* from many interesting angles, revealing the neurotic quality of Léon's love for the city, adding another shade of meaning to the Epiphany of Christ toward the end of the novel, illustrating another Rome of which Christ is the citizen, recalling the Hebraic Graeco-Roman dichotomy which Rome embodies and which is symbolised by the figures of the sibyl and Zachariah.

[12] Léon Roudiez has pointed out that just as Julian was the representative of the Roman Empire in Paris, so Léon represents a Roman power there, the Scabelli organisation. Roudiez concludes that "the fact that this power, the typewriter firm, is but a perversion and a caricature of the Roman Empire is obviously a commentary on Léon's life. Op. cit. p. 21.

[13] In his book *Michel Butor ou le livre futur* (Paris, 1964), pp. 172-184, Jean Roudaut points out the connection with the Sistine, and has gone so far as to say that the

railway carriage in fact *becomes* the Sistine Chapel. "... le wagon est devenu la chapelle Sixtine, lieu de culte, lieu des prophètes et des sibylles, lieu de jugement." He then proceeds to an interesting analysis of the role of Christianity in *La Modification* and in Butor's thought generally. He is, however, mistaken in his assertion that the Persian and Erythraean Sibyls are one and the same. On the Sistine Ceiling they are very sharply contrasted, Erythraea being young and vigorously beautiful while Persica is a decrepit old woman lacking all creative inspiration.

[14] Aeneid, Bk. 3, 443. There is a close resemblance also to Dante's Charon, who "batte col remo qualunque s'adagia" (Inferno, 3, 111).

[15] Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradiso, Canto 33, ll. 63-66. The Cumaea is the only sibyl mentioned by Dante and he uses the idea of the flying leaves as a symbol for the fleeting nature of the vision of God or the truth.

[16] See Charles Till Davis, *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (Oxford, 1957).

[17] See Charles de Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1949) pp. 46-47. Speaking of the *spiritualis ignis* which illuminates the existence of the prophets and sibyls, de Tolnay says: "It is a *renovatio*, brought about by the contemplation of the truth. In each case the artist shows the state of apathy before this awakening in the *regno verace* .... It is the *renovatio* of the soul: an ascent to a higher life through the descent of the Divine, because only he who is newly born can see God and the Truth... ."

[18] See de Tolnay's five-volume work on Michelangelo for a full discussion of the observations on this artist which follow, particularly the volume on the Sistine mentioned above and volume 5, *The Final Period*, which deals with the *Last Judgment*.

[19] This sleeping figure has been identified by de Tolnay as the mother of Asa. He describes her as being of "herculean proportions" (op. cit., p. 82). The woman in *La Modification* was "une grande Romaine".

As for the *lunettes*, which are crescent-shaped spaces in the ceiling filled with paintings of the ancestors of Christ, de Tolnay interprets them as representing the sphere of shadow and death.

See the reference on P. 189 to the "lunettes cerclées de fer du vieil Italien en face de vous qui dort déjà," and again to the "vieil Italien en face de vous, le seul qui ait peut-être les yeux ouverts, vous ne pouvez pas le savoir derrière ses lunettes rondes qui brillent au milieu de la pénombre bleue..."

[20] Erwin Panofsky, "Michelangelo and Dürer," *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (Columbia: U. of South Carolina Press, 1968), p. 118. The Italian text reads:

> "Non ha l'ottimo artista in se alcun concetto,
> Ch'un marmo solo in se non circoscriva
> Col suo soverchio; e solo a quello arriva
> La man che ubbidisce all'intelletto.
> Il mal ch'io fuggo, e'l ben ch'io mi prometto,
> In te Donna leggiadra, altera e diva,
> Tal si nasconde; e perch'io più non viva,
> Contraria ho l'arte al disiato effetto.
> Amor dunque non ha, nè tua beltate,
> O durezza, o fortuna, o gran disdegno,
> Del mio mal colpa, o mio destino o sorte,
> Se dentro del tuo cor morte e pietate
> Porti in un tempo, e che'l mio basso ingegno
> Non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte."

"Del mio mal colpa" accords perfectly with the theme of the *fissure* (fault, in another sense) in *La Modification*, while in turn, the frequent references in the novel to *craquelures*, *lézardes* and *fissures*, surely have their origin in the network of cracks which disfigures the Sistine frescoes and which have become one of their most characteristic features.

[21] With regard to Léon's heroic aspirations and the somewhat enigmatic presence of Julian the Apostate in the novel, the following remarks of Georges Dupeyron, in his article on Butor's book on Montaigne, are interesting:

> "Quant au portrait de la Boétie, Michel Butor lui trouve pour pendant celui de Julien l'Apostat, qui était à sa manière un exilé dans son siècle, tout comme l'ami de Montaigne. Et non moins rempli de mérites." (Op. cit., p. 23).

It is significant that Julian nourished much the same feeling for Paris as Léon does for Rome. His apostasy is also probably a feature which interests Léon, and possibly Butor.

[22] Roudaut, p. 142.

[23] T. S. Eliot, writing of Joyce's "myth-making method," "Ulysses, Order and Myth," *The Dial*, LXXV (November, 1923), pp. 480-483.

Degrees of Affinity

"Il faut procéder par degrés." Butor

Degrés[1] is a pivotal book in Butor's *oeuvre*. The last of what has been called his *Romanesque I* period, the last book to date to bear the sub-title *roman*, it is already tending toward the break with tradition which *Mobile* will incarnate, while at the same time it subsumes the three earlier novels. It might be described as Butor's last attempt to work "within the system", and on that level, it was not a success.

After the critical and even popular acclaim accorded to *La Modification*, hailed as a *nouveau roman* which, at last one could understand, *Degrés*, for the most part, received a poor press. Butor had become something of a white hope for those who were scandalised by the "new novel". They found *Degrés* disquieting. Critical disappointment with Butor was in direct proportion to the false (in every sense) hopes raised by *La Modification*. The situation is perhaps best summed up by the latin tag invoked by Pierre-Henri Simon, "corruptio optimi pessima".[2]

Probably, therefore, *Degrés* was also a *livre-pivot*[3] for Butor as an artist, at a more personal level. He has remarked somewhat bitterly that *La Modification*:

> "C'était le thème classique du roman français bourgeois. Mettez un adultère dans un livre: tout le monde comprend. Dès qu'on sort de cela on est criminel." [4]

Seeing the way in which *La Modification* had been absorbed, *consumed* by the bourgeois reading public, Butor may well have asked himself how well he had succeeded in making his real intentions understood. Paradoxically, as Mallarmé discovered, the work of art which is easy of access is frequently the most *mis*understood, and for that very reason. This was Revel's experience with the Harvey Tapestries and his articulation of it was doubtless intended as encouragement to Butor's own readers:

> "Car si ce travail d'approche m'avait été épargné, si j'avais eu d'emblée à ma disposition un catalogue semblable à celui-ci par lequel je sais maintenant les noms de tous ces criminels exécutés, de toutes ces femmes, de tous ces lieux, les tapisseries n'auraient pas pris dans me vie tant d'importance." (ET, 228).

However, though the first three novels posed certain difficulties, they could all be read, and evidently were, for the story-line. This remains a possibility in *Degrés*, but only just. Pierre Vernier's project of describing an hour's history lesson does not, at first glance, appear to offer much in the way of intrigue, and although the novel abounds in other possible plots *in embryo* (the break-up of the Bailly *ménage* for example, or Vernier's love affair with Micheline Pavin) none of these is developed sufficiently to serve as a peg on which the novel may hang.

It seems to me that Butor, seeing how the traditional element in his work was tending to obscure its novelty, determined, with *Degrés*, to test both the capacity of the traditional novel to encompass innovation without stifling it, and the ability of his public to appreciate the *real* nature of the research he was conducting. The reader's participation in this enterprise would have to be more active, involve more of an effort, than had hitherto been the case. This is reflected throughout *Degrés* by the emphasis that is placed on books and reading, "ce vice impuni."

Consider this penetrating description of the rapid assessment every reader makes before embarking on a piece of fiction: Pierre Eller is flipping through a schoolboy's magazine called appropriately enough, *Fiction*:

> "La première nouvelle s'appelait *La Rhu'ad*; cela avait l'air long, ne me disait rien.
>
> La seconde, *Le Train 1815*, était de Claude Farrère, de l'Académie Française; comment? ... il ne saurait probablement pas me donner ce dont j'avais envie.
>
> L'introduction de la troisième, *Le Jeu du Silence*, 'Fritz Leiber, qui suivait d'abord au théâtre les traces de son père, éminent shakespearien...', bien, bien, on verrait." (*Degrés*, 223).

Butor's preceding three novels dealt in varying ways with the question "Comment écrire?", *Degrés* pursues this line of inquiry and opens another one, "Comment lire?"

What happens in *Degrés*? Pierre Vernier, teacher of History and Geography at the *Lycée Taine*, conceives the project of writing a description of a History lesson given to the pupils of the *second degré* on Tuesday October 12th, 1954, between the hours of three and four on the subject of the discovery and conquest of America. The description is intended for his nephew, Pierre Eller, who is a member of the class and who has another uncle, Henri Jouret, on the staff. It is this basic triadic relationship which inspires Vernier to undertake his description, since it is not common for such a nexus of family relationships to occur in the context of the *lycée*. But it is not the only such group involving the same class, since two other boys, Alain Mouron and Michel Daval, are cousins, and nephews by marriage of the classics teacher, René Bailly. Vernier decides to "explore" the class on the basis of an ever-widening network of relationships which will enable him to introduce, one by one, each boy in the class and each teacher in the school.

He soon finds, however, that in order to describe the lesson on October 12th adequately, he is compelled to find out what was going on in the other rooms in the school at the same time and eventually to pursue the roots of the hour into the past and its consequences into the future. This in turn involves displaying an indiscreet interest in the personal lives of teachers and students and in order to obtain information on the latter, Vernier is forced to enlist the aid of his nephew. The psychological pressures involved eventually prove intolerable for the boy and Vernier, more and more obsessed with his description, and overburdened with work (he undertakes to familiarise himself with the entire curriculum), collapses and dies before he has finished his gargantuan task. It is completed by Henri Jouret. (The second section of the book is written as if by the nephew, Pierre Eller, but it is important to understand that this change of narrator is fictional, in the sense that it is a device used by *Vernier* and not by Butor.)

Even this very brief resumé suggests the manner in which *Degrés* embodies on a technical and structural level, as well as thematically, the preoccupations of Butor's preceding three works. The superposition in space and the network of family relationships appeared, though in very much simpler form, in *Passage de Milan*, as well as the adolescent world and even the *lycée*, represented (as so often in *Degrés* itself) by the burdensome homework it imposes. The problems which writing creates for Vernier recall those encountered by Revel and the consequences for him are even more grave. The very notion of an *emploi du temps* is closely associated with a school curriculum but as Butor points out:

> " ... la grande différence entre ces deux livres, c'est dans *Degrés* la multiplicité des points de vue, justement, et donc des emplois de temps, lesquels s'entrecroisent."

In *L'Emploi du temps* time is exteriorised, in the sense that it is marked off by a dated diary. In *La Modification*, Butor wished to interiorise it: "Intégrer le temps", by developing a certain *décor mental* in which the passing landscape and objects in the compartment had the effect of recalling incidents of former journeys. Landscape and objects functioned as a sort of punctuation, directing the mind of the reader. In *Degrés*, Butor wished to integrate this punctuation even further and this was made possible by the subject itself:

> " ... dans l'enseignement, journées et heures sont caractérisés par les matières enseignées. Il y a un décor: la classe. Il y a un décor mental: les matières scolaires enseignées dans le second degré."[5]

Thus once the time-table has been established, not only could one say: "On Tuesday at ten *les sixième* will be learning Geography from M. Vernier", but also: "Les sixième are learning Geography from M. Vernier, therefore it must be ten o'clock on Tuesday." If we cast our minds back to Léon's railway journey we can see the reason for Butor's remark to Hubert Juin that " ... *Degrés* repose techniquement sur *La Modification*."[6] At the same time, it brings together in a manner not attempted in any of its predecessors all the themes which Butor has said interest him most, on a conscious level: " ... la notion de ville, celle de l'éducation, l'école. ... Oui l'histoire universelle."[7]

The themes of education and the school, since they particularly dominate *Degrés*, suggest themselves as a first avenue of approach to the novel.

"Le point le plus sensible d'une civilisation c'est toujours la façon dont le savoir s'y transmet." Butor

Although the reader's attention may still, in *Degrés*, be captured by the *élément romanesque*, it is to the description of secondary education which the book provides, that Butor himself attaches the most importance.[8] Having been a teacher as well as a student in the secondary system, he wrote the novel " ... pour tâcher de voir l'enseignement français de l'extérieur."," ... un peu comme on fabrique des fusées maintenant pour voir la terre de l'extérieur;" (Entretiens, 10). It is in fact "une étude pour une représentation de l'enseignement secondaire" and its plural title is an index of the movement away from the individual to the collective, which will be developed further in *Mobile*.

Degrés is a multivalent title. It refers to the degrees of consanguinity which form one of the basic structures of the novel, to the degrees of latitude and longitude by which the earth's surface is measured and to the grades of the French secondary school system. This last usage conceals a metaphor, incidentally, which Butor brings to our attention by referring to "cette échelle de l'enseignement secondaire"[9] (*Degrés*, 150) and the motif of the ladder recurs throughout the book (Jacob's ladder and the ladder descending into the Potosi mines are two examples).[10] In writing about secondary education, Butor makes an appeal to the experience of most of his readers, nearly all of whom would have climbed the ladder leading to the *bachot*, that essential initiation into the bourgeois intelligentsia. He is dealing with a phenomenon which may vary in its effect from individual to individual, but which is experienced collectively, by them as a class. *Degrés* could have been sub-titled *"critique de l'enseignement secondaire en France"*.

But criticism of an education system necessarily implies criticism of a society. As Henri Jouret points out to one of his classes:

> "La mauvaise éducation produit une manière de vivre vicieuse, et c'est toute la façon de vivre de Gargantua, dans ses moindres aspects, que Ponocrates s'efforcerà de redresser." (*Degrés*, 109).

It does not occur to him, however, to evaluate the education system in which he himself is working, nor to examine the life-style of his students. It did occur to Butor, and eight years before *les évènements* of May 1968.

Should one conclude from this that with *Degrés* the emphasis is shifting from the epic to the didactic in Butor's aesthetic of the novel[11]? This would depend on what precisely is understood by "didactic". While it would be true to say that Butor believes firmly in the power of art to teach and intends that *all* his own books should do so, yet he does not mean by this that the work of art should be a vehicle to convey pre-conceived knowledge or opinion. A book, for him, is always the instrument by which he *himself* arrives at understanding. The reader may use it afterwards as a map to guide him along the same route but the point is that it is a route which Butor has opened by travelling it himself, not merely by pointing it out. One might say that to be didactic in the best sense, a book must have been *autodidactic* for Butor first. *Degrés* is therefore a didactic book by this standard because, it represents Butor's attempt to see the secondary system from the outside, hence to make sense of his own experience, since, as he says, "Je vivais moi-même dans le monde de *Degrés*."[12] But it is perhaps no more didactic in intention in this sense than *L'Emploi du temps*, but only more overtly so, because of the nature of the subject and because there is less of an intrigue for the reader to fasten on to.

Degrés is certainly a pedantic book, appropriately enough, and Butor freely admits his pedantry, a tendency which he claims to share with James Joyce, and to which he gave free rein in *La Modification*. The net-work of cross-cultural references in that novel might have baffled even the reader endowed with a good bourgeois secondary education, and doubtless this aroused some resentment. Despite the skill with which these references were woven into the text, such a dazzling display of erudition could conceivably have been interpreted as self-indulgence or intellectual snobbery. The subject matter of *Degrés*, however, gives Butor ample excuse to draw on a wide-ranging culture without incurring such criticisms. As he himself points out somewhat ironically:

> " ... j'ai voulu échapper un peu à la difficulté de Joyce vis-à-vis du lecteur. J'ai voulu éviter que le lecteur ne se retranche derrière le fait que la culture cernée était trop vaste pour lui. Mais le programme du second degré? Eh bien! Tout le monde est censé le connaître, quand même!"[13]

The irony is double-edged. Not only is it implied that it would be an error to suppose that the programme for the *second degré* is within everyone's grasp, but furthermore that it would be equally erroneous to suppose that the scope of that programme was limited. Pierre Vernier's experience, when he virtually *becomes* himself a student in the *second degré* illustrates both of these points.

In order to complete his project of describing his nephew Pierre Eller's class, Vernier discovers that it will be necessary for him to familiarise himself with the entire curriculum set for the *second degré*[14]. He must know what homework the students have been set, what preparations the teachers have made for their classes, so that, extrapolating from this verifiable information, he may *imagine with precision* as he says, the occupations and pre-occupations of teachers and students. He buys the prescribed texts and sets about following the same course of study as the boys in the *second degré*, pursuing it eventually to the point of preparing the assignments they are given.

He soon becomes appalled at the magnitude of the task he has undertaken: "Vous n'avez pas idée des choses que j'ai à apprendre." (*Degrés*, 371), he remarks ruefully. But the point is that he is taking the programme seriously, while the boys are not. For them it is a question of surviving the daily inquisition of the masters, an objective which militates against the development of their retentive powers on any but a rigorously short-term basis, and prevents the formulation of any balanced overview of what is taught. They are being subjected to a process which inspires in them a mixture of distrust, fear, boredom or indifference, punctuated by isolated flashes of interest which the system quickly stifles. They are too intimidated to question the masters about subjects of which they would like to know more and even if this were not so, their course is so demanding and so rigidly structured that they could not contemplate pursuing any non-essential knowledge for its own sake. Pierre Eller's reaction to Vernier's *leçon-pivot*, which was, incidentally, *hors* *programme*, is a case in point:

> "... d'ailleurs, il savait rendre les choses intéressantes et c'était bien dommage qu'il ne vous lût pas plus souvent des textes comme ceux de la veille, ces descriptions de la Chine, ou ce truc sur la conquête de l'Amérique; tu avais presque envie de lui demander ces deux bouquins, mais ce devait être en vieux français avec des *s* partout et tu avais déjà, suffisamment à faire pour l'instant avec ce sacré Rabelais;" (P. 324).

At Eller's age, victim of the same system, Vernier doubtless felt the same. Realising this, he is now trying to take possession of the education which formed him but which he was incapable of seeing from the outside at the time. His book is intended for his nephew so that by its agency, he may, in turn, take possession "de cet enseignement qui sera passé,"(P.119). The implication is, of course, that the majority never really appropriates that education, and in *Degrés* Butor is performing the same service for them (and for himself) as Vernier for himself and his nephew.

The fact is that the professors are as much prisoners of the tread-mill of the secondary system as the boys. They spend their evenings in preparation which is equally onerous. Indeed it duplicates the homework they will eventually set. They are perpetually short of time, and any research projects which their reading may suggest to them must be repeatedly postponed until finally all enthusiasm evaporates. René Bailly's thesis on Wordsworth is an example. Even Vernier, for all his dedication (he sets up a truly Gargantuan time-table, living under "telle discipline qu'il ne perdait heure du jour"[15]) cannot maintain his high standards, and his study of the texts becomes increasingly hurried and inadequate: "il a dû renoncer à vérifier les mots dans le dictionnaire et les formes dans la grammaire,"(P.331). He ends up, in other words, adopting the same solution as the boys. Perhaps no other is possible in the face of a curriculum so wide-ranging and so fragmented. The different subjects are so rigidly compartmentalised that creative thought, the ability to show the connections between things, is stifled.

This principle of division is carried over into the relationship between teacher and student, effectively masking from both the extent to which they share a common experience. It is even more powerful than ties of blood. Thus Pierre Eller is astonished at the transformation of l'oncle Henri when he takes his stand on the rostrum:

> " ... car cet homme si doux, si fantasque, si joueur, ... tout d'un coup, c'était un autre, dur, cassant, un peu sarcastique," (P. 23),

and there is latent distrust in his relationship with Pierre Vernier, even though the latter takes him into his confidence. After all, all teachers are the same, "... ils avaient toujours derrière la tête l'idée de vous faire travailler..."(P.324). He is not sure that Vernier's invitation to collaborate in the description of the class is not:

> " ... une ruse de professeur, une façon de faire de la retape, de la surenchère, de la publicité vis-à-vis des parents et du proviseur, et des inspecteurs, des autorités, de te forcer à apprendre mieux tes leçons," (P. 324).

The relationship between teacher and student, founded in mutual weakness and fear, must result, at best, in a kind of armed truce. It is a mutual dependency with each side at the mercy of the other. Looking at l'oncle Henri, and sensing his uneasiness vis-à-vis himself, Pierre Eller realises that "... il était dans ton pouvoir de lui rendre la vie extrèmement difficile,". (P. 23).

Masters and boys alike dance to the tune of the *grelot baccalauréat* and learning is reduced to the mechanical absorption of formulae. This is not to say that there are not good teachers; Pierre Vernier is one, and indeed most of them have their moments of inspiration when their subjects come to life, but the system finally breaks Vernier, and the others are content for the most part to play their role of *juge d'instruction*. One is therefore led to ask what the famous culture which the *lycée* inculcates really amounts to. The answer is implied in an advertisement which Eller reads in the magazine *Fiction*, touting a brochure entitled: *"On vous jugera sur votre culture* ... passionnante brochure illustrée gratuite No 1428 sur simple demande à l'institut culturel français..." (P. 371). Culture has become a commodity, a consumer good. Absorbed, recuperated by the *bourgeoisie*, the power of art and learning to liberate and change has been neutralised. If another Renaissance is to take place in the twentieth century it must take its departure, as before, from "une réforme de l'enseignement" bringing to completion the reform begun centuries ago "... qui a mis fort longtemps à s'accomplir, qui n'est peut-être qu'ébauchée même aujourd'hui."(34)

In order for this reform to take place, it is first of all necessary that people become aware of what the current educational system is really like: that they cease to view it through the rose-coloured spectacles of nostalgia and bourgeois self-satisfaction. This is one of the tasks undertaken by *Degrés*, and the method employed: direct confrontation of the reader with the substance of that education, the curriculum: *la matière*, is highly effective. The devices Butor uses to accomplish this are chiefly two: quotation and enumeration.[16]

"Quelle est donc la magie d'un écrivain capable de transformer des anecdotes bien connues, des vers appris par coeur dans les collèges, tant de choses anodines en un composé si dangereux? Il lui suffit donc de les rassembler d'une certaine manière, et tout rajeunit, mord, menace."
Butor

In *Degrés* a complex interplay of texts and historical and scientific data is established which seems initially to reproduce the confusion of the secondary school programme, but which, on closer examination, turns out to be highly structured. These structures emerge according as one makes connections between the various quotations and scraps of information given, and of course it is the failure of the students, for the most part, to do this that keeps them confused. But it would be wrong to imagine that the effect of reading *Degrés* is to fill the *lacunae* of the reader's education. Rather these are brought forcefully to his attention so that he is compelled to take a new look at the culture which he believes he has assimilated and to question his familiarity with certain classics which he may have taken for granted. *Degrés* is a demonstration of a situation already described by Mallarmé:

> "Vous penserez à Corneille, à Moliere, à Racine, qui sont populaires et glorieux? - Non ils ne sont pas populaires: leur nom peut-être, leurs vers, cela est faux. La foule les a lus une fois, je le confesse, sans les comprendre."[17]

In an essay on Racine, written in 1959, therefore in the incubation period for *Degrés*, and published in the first *Répertoire*, which came out in the same year as the novel, Butor wrote:

> "Or, j'en prends à témoin tous ceux qui ont fait de l'enseignement, il suffit d'avoir fait expliquer honnêtement à des élèves, même français, *Iphigénie* ou *Athalie* pour se rendre compte du nombre énorme de mots, de noms ou de tournures qui exigent un commentaire, sans quoi les vers ne forment plus qu'une sorte de ritournelle reposante certes, mais abêtissante." (R 1, 29).

He is challenging the same thing here as in *Degrés*, the belief in the illusory clarity and facility of the "classics" which is central to the bourgeois notion of "Kulchur", and which is all one with a misplaced confidence in the efficacy of *les études secondaires*. By confronting the reader with the reality of his secondary education: the stumbling word for word translations, the truncated *morceaux choisis*, the feverish and inadequate nightly homework which looks no further than the next day's ordeal in class, *Degrés* invites the reader to wake up from:

> " ... son sommeil de bourgeois cultivé (on a fait du latin), de bourgeois à bon goût (on aime les bergères Louis XV, et on ne se laisse pas si facilement impressionner par les barbares écrivains étrangers, ou par les outrances de ces jeunes gens qui ne cherchent qu'à nous épater) de bourgeois dont il faut bien que les études secondaires aient servis à quelque chose." (R 1, 28-29).

Butor's use of quotation in *Degrés* is not without precedent, indeed he himself has written essays on at least three writers whose work is constructed around a wealth of historical and literary references; Montaigne, Pound and Joyce. What he has to say about their procedures, therefore, may be helpful in elucidating his own.

I will deal with Pound and Joyce first, since they are the subjects of three essays in the first *Répertoire*; two on Joyce (1948 and 1957) and one on Pound (1956).[18] According to himself, Butor wished *Degrés* to be easier of access than Joyce's novels, hence the fact that its references are limited to the programme for the *second degré*. Irony apart, there is an element of truth in this which is supported by the fact that nearly all the quotations in *Degrés* are in quotation marks and that their source is given. Butor is aiming for something different from the exhilarating guessing game to which *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* invites the reader, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he is hoping to achieve a similar effect by different means. Here is how he interprets the richness of Joyce's historical and literary allusion:

> "Si Joyce y a mis le plus d'éléments historiques et littéraires possibles, ce n'est pas dans le dessein d'augmenter notre culture générale, mais c'est pour que chacun de nous puisse en reconnaître quelques-uns, et par conséquent pénétrer à l'intérieur du jeu qu'il nous propose. Il est clair pourtant que

> le texte nous parlera d'autant plus, et d'autant plus vite, que nous aurons une culture historique et littéraire qui recouvrira mieux la sienne." (R 1, 226).

By limiting the scope of his references to the programme for the *second degré*, Butor can legitimately hope his readers will have ready access to the *substantifique moëlle* of his book. On the other hand, since the curriculum up to and including the *second degré* encompasses the history of Western Man from Homeric times onward, Butor can cast his net as wide as Joyce's.

One of the important uses of allusion is the economy which it allows the writer to practise. A word or phrase rich with literary or historical associations, properly placed, can fulfil the function of several pages. This is at the root of Pound's *logopeia*, "'the dance of the intellect among words'", which:

> "employs words not only for their direct meaning, but ... takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we *expect* to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play."[19]

Butor makes the point, in his essay on Pound, that this device :

> "lui permet d'évoquer avec une étonnante économie tout un moment historique, toute une façon de vivre, de penser et de sentir, mais il implique que le lecteur soit capable de situer le langage dont on lui présente un échantillon." (R 1, 237).

Unfortunately, in Pound's case, Butor argues, the reader is frequently unable to do this, and the effect is lost. This is because of Pound's highly idiosyncratic notion of what the "classics" were.

The *Cantos* were not intended to be obscure, though they are highly allusive, because Pound believed that *his* classics would become universally accepted as such, so that the references in which his poetry abounds would quickly become readily identifiable. This did not happen and consequently Pound's project of writing "le conte de la tribu'; poème épique, c'est-à-dire 'poème intégrant l'histoire'" which would be "...pour l'humanité présente le moyen d'assainir la conscience qu'elle a d'elle-même et de son devenir." (R 1, 236), has, according to Butor largely failed. One could say that, in his view, Pound is a Joyce gone too far, and it is clear that in *Degrés* Butor wished to avoid this pitfall. His choice of classics are those taught in the secondary school, therefore universally accepted as such in France, and combined with the historical span of the programme, the result comes very close to the Poundian epic ideal. Furthermore, the economic principle of *logopeia* is reflected in what Butor has called "l'économie stylistique que me permettait l'emploi de l'enseignement français comme structure fondamentale." (Entretiens, 16).

The two-way action of a time-table, which permits one to say not only: "It is two o'clock on Monday, therefore M. X. is with class Y," but also "M.X. is with Class Y, therefore it is two o'clock on Monday," may be extended by the introduction of other factors in addition to time and place, so that by recording the subject taught, for example, one can add to the two propositions above, a third: "It is two o'clock on Monday, therefore M. X. is talking about Julius Caesar," and a fourth: "M. X. is talking about Julius Caesar, therefore it is two o'clock on Monday." Eventually, when the time-table becomes more familiar, Butor says:

> "il me suffira de dire le Professeur Untel regarde l'élève Untel, pour que je sache le temps, le lieu, et ce dont il est question, et l'horizon culturel à l'intérieur duquel on se trouve." (Entretiens, 18).

But in order for this economy to work effectively, a book must be structured in a certain way. Referring to *Degrés*, Butor says:

> "Dans un livre comme celui-là, le début pose un certain système de références qui sera utilisé par la suite, laquelle suite développera ce système de références qui permettra de lire encore la suite,"

so that, "ce qui au début du livre demandait plusieurs pages, va au milieu du livre, demander quelques lignes." (Entretiens, 19). The effort demanded of the reader is still considerable, for Butor is emphatic in his demand that he carry in his head all the elided material, but unlike Pound, he has placed the underlying system of references at the reader's disposal so that as the book progresses:

> " ... ce sont ses propres mots qui vont être chargés de significations de plus en plus précises et de plus en plus riches, ces mots qui sont utilisés comme noeuds d'un système de références de plus en plus précis, et de plus en plus complexe." (Entretiens, 20).[20]

Ezra Pound wrote that "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree."

The fact that the epic hero of the *Cantos*, Ulysses, features so prominently in Butor's novel, together with its wealth of literary and historical references, spanning the centuries from the time of the *Odyssey* to the France of the fifties, gives *Degrés* a fair claim to being "le conte de la tribu" dreamed of by Pound. The organisation of its system of references has, moreover, a Poundian slant, which is revealed by applying Butor's own method, in his study of Montaigne, to *Degrés*.

In his book on Montaigne[21] Butor emphasises the strongly *composed* quality of the *Essais* and addresses himself to discovering:

> "... la figure déterminante formée par chacun des livres, figure que les alluvionnements successifs ne détruisent pas, mais précisent, raffermissent au contraire en la diversifiant." (P. 20).

It seems to me that the basic figure of *Degrés* is the voyage of discovery, the periplum, and I will try, briefly, to show how it is reinforced by the *alluvionnements successifs* of quotation and historical reference throughout the novel.

The nodal point of *Degrés* is Vernier's lesson on the discovery of America, which, incidentally, neatly combines History and Geography. An earlier lesson had been devoted to the distortion imposed by Mercator's projection which is "une représentation fidèle mais incommode" and Vernier warns his students that in consequence, they must:

> "'... toujours beaucoup se méfier, surtout des cartes qui prétendent représenter toute la terre, essayer de garder toujours présent à l'esprit le genre de corrections que l'on doit leur apporter...'" (P. 40).

As Pound wrote:

> "periplum, not as land looks on a map
> but as sea bord seen by men sailing."

Vernier's warning is not limited to the interpretation of maps, but extends to any world-view which one might be tempted to accept unquestioningly, including the programme taught in the French *lycées*. The same point is obliquely made in the course of his interrogation of Jean-Pierre Cormier on the subject of the Renaissance. Cormier answers correctly that this period was characterised by a desire to rediscover antiquity, to return to the classical texts themselves and to reject the Latin commentaries of the Middle Ages. This had become necessary because people "se contentaient de ce qu'on en disait dans les écoles." (P. 34) and this was found to be no longer sufficient, partly as a result of the discoveries of Constantinople and America, which forced people to recognise that "le monde n'était pas comme on croyait." (P. 34).

The Renaissance embraces the discovery of two worlds, the old and the new. The periplum of Ulysses at one pole and that of Columbus at the other, both of which figure in *Degrés*. The connecting link between the two in the novel is supplied by Keats's sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*[22], itself based on the idea of the periplum:

"Oft have I travelled in the realms of gold"

and uniting in its last lines, the Odyssey and the New World.

The reader in Keats's poem is not only identified with the mariner, but with the astronomer:

> "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;"

The sailor navigates by the stars though, and Pierre Vernier is prompted to begin his book by the "exceptionnelle constellation de cousinages"[23] (P. 44) in the *seconde A* which will in turn serve as a guide to the reader. There being no new worlds to conquer on this earth for the students, they dream of inter-planetary travel, and feed their dreams on *Galaxie*.

Butor shares Keats's view of reading as a voyage:

> "Toute fiction s'inscrit donc en notre espace comme voyage et l'on peut dire à cet egard que c'est là le thème fondamentale de toute littérature romanesque;" (R 2, 44).

At the same time, he argues, it is not simple escapism which is involved here, since the further one gets away from home the more the point of departure assumes the charm of the distant, and we feel the pull of the Greek *nostos*; but when we arrive back at our starting point it appears to us under a new aspect:

> "La distance fondamentale du roman réaliste est donc non seulement voyage, mais périple; cette proximité du lieu qu'on me décrit contracte en elle tout un voyage autour du monde." (R 2, 44).

But, as Vernier warns, the reader must exercise the same vigilance as the map-reader because:

> "... il est impossible de représenter la terre avec précision sans la déformer, de même qu'il est impossible de faire passer la réalité dans

> le discours sans employer un certain type de projection, un certain réseau de repères dont la forme et l'organisation dépendent de ce que l'on cherche à mettre en évidence et, corollairement, de ce qu'on a besoin de savoir." (P. 56).

I suggest that these references constitute at least one *réseau de repères* under-pinning *Degrés* which is complemented by the following remarks from Hugh Kenner's book on Pound. Commenting on the frequent use of the word "periplum", in the *Pisan Cantos*, Kenner writes:

> "Victor Bérard discovered that the geography of the *Odyssey*, grotesque when referred to a map, was minutely accurate according to the Phoenician voyagers' *periploi*. The image of successive discoveries breaking upon the consciousness of the voyager is one of Pound's central themes... The periplum, the voyage of discovery among facts, ... is everywhere contrasted with the conventions and artificialities of the bird's eye view afforded by the map..."[24]

Or, in Butor's case, one might add, the bird's eye view afforded by the *échelle des études secondaires*. As in the Middle Ages, we have become content with what is being said in the schools. It is time for new discoveries to precipitate a new Renaissance, or at least to bring the earlier one to fruition.

That such a conclusion can be drawn from *Degrés* as a result of an examination of one of its internal "réseau de repères", supports Butor's theory of the symbolism of the novel as a genre.

> "J'appelle 'symbolisme' d'un roman l'ensemble des relations de ce qu'il nous décrit avec la réalité où nous vivons. ...
> Le symbolisme externe du roman tend à se réfléchir dans un symbolisme interne, certaines parties jouant, par rapport à l'ensemble, le même rôle que celui-ci par rapport à la réalité."
>
> Butor

Degrés abounds in examples of this reflected symbolism. "Intégrant l'histoire", it centres round a history lesson. Vying in the range of its ambition with Mallarmé's *Livre*, which would unite the world, it revolves round Christopher Columbus, who saw himself as "envoyé pour réunir la terre" [25] and who is himself reflected throughout the book in figures such as Ulysses, Marco Polo, Julius Caesar, who:

> "...doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus..." (P. 227),

and the Ancient Mariner. The basic figure of the book, the periplum, a circular form, is linked with the roundness of the earth and with the earth's revolution on its axis, the subject of one of Vernier's Geography lessons, giving another gloss to the expression *heure-pivot*. (The word *Degrés* may also refer to the degrees of a circle.)

Sensing that he has lost the attention of one of the students during the vital lesson on the discovery of America, this is how Vernier reacts:

> "J'essaie de l'arracher à cela; je fixe les yeux sur lui, hausse le ton; je veux le forcer à entrer comme les autres dans le cercle de mon discours." (P. 67-68).

Any teacher will recognise this description as accurate but there is more to it than a successful piece of "realism". It recalls the *Ancient Mariner:*

> "He holds him with his glittering eye -
> The Wedding-Guest stood still,
> And listens like a three-year's child:
> The Mariner hath his will."

and by extension, the writer's effort to capture the reader's attention. Indeed the object of the novel's symbolism is precisely to draw the reader into the circle of Butor's discourse. The advantage of the circular form is that it permits entry at virtually any point on its circumference. Given the wealth of the symbolic schemata and the manner in which they are inter-related, when one has grasped one of them one has acquired access to the work and the rest will follow, like the successive discoveries breaking on the consciousness of Pound's voyager. Butor's remarks about internal and external symbolism carry the implication that the novel will itself tell us how to read it.

Almost at the very beginning of *Degrés* there is a particularly apt illustration of this. Pierre Eller has been asked by his *Oncle Henri* to read an extract from Gargantua's letter to Pantagruel:

> "Tu aurais bien voulu savoir s'il fallait lire le paragraphe en petits caractères, dans lequel l'éditeur donnait quelques indications sur la situation et le contenu du morceau:

> astérisque, 'devenu étudiant, Pantagruel fait le tour des universités françaises...'
>
> ou encore:
>
> triangle, 'la plupart des chapitres consacrés aux études de Pantagruel...'
>
> ou encore:
>
> cercle, 'on trouvera dans Gargantua un programme plus développé; ici, c'est l'esprit même...'," (P. 11).

The circle, although the most important, in my view, is not the only figure to be discerned in *Degrés*. There are two others, represented by the *constellation de cousinages* and the triadic groupings round which Vernier constructs his description of the class.

The asterisk, from the Greek *aster*, represented typographically by a star, could reasonably be taken as a symbol of the *constellation* mentioned above, while the connection between the triad and the triangle is obvious. Thus the three basic figures of *Degrés* appear in sharp typographical relief in a passage which is really about two subjects: Gargantua's views on the education of his son, and the mechanics of reading. The first reflects Butor's exploration in the novel, the second follows naturally from that, as a piece of realistic description, while at the same time, on a symbolic level, instructing the reader on how to approach *Degrés*.

Butor proceeds in the same manner as Vernier, with the same objective, that is to say by means of our reading to make us remember our education, and much besides:

> "... dans un certain ordre et selon certaines formes et organisations qui te permettront de le saisir et de le fixer, de le situer et apprécier, ce dont pour l'instant tu es incapable, manquant de ce système de reférence que l'on cherche à te faire acquérir, de telle sorte qu'en toi pourra naître une nouvelle conscience, et que tu deviendras apte à ressaisir justement cette énorme masse d'informations qui circule, à l'intérieur de laquelle, comme dans une fleuve boueuse et tourbillonnant, tu te meux ignorant, emporté,"[26] (P. 82).

This *nouvelle conscience* will involve seeing Europe, and what it means, and has meant, to be a European, in a new perspective.

The *système de reférence* corresponds to Butor's *symbolisme d'un roman*. It is "l'ensemble des relations de ce qu'il nous décrit avec la réalité où nous vivons" and it is reflected in an internal system which enables us to *read* the novel in the sense that we discern its structure; to place the various parts in relation to each other and to the whole. But we have not really read the novel until we are capable "de le situer et apprécier" in relation to the world in which we live. The external and internal symbolisms are interdependent but it is necessary first to grasp the latter before the former will be revealed.

To take one example of how this process works, it is strongly implied in *Degrés* that evil does not go unpunished. This is the theme of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, of

Macbeth and of one of the short stories in *Galaxie*: "Quelque chose pour rien," on which the editor comments as follows: "'pas d'illusions pour des souhaits gratuits: tôt ou tard, vous en recevrez la facture'." (P. 300). This system of references, coherent in itself, is a reflection of the guilty relations Europe has with the New World, relations which were founded in the conquest and greedy exploitation of native peoples and natural resources.[27] This is brought out by the quotations from Montaigne's essay "Des Coches" and illustrated by the picture which appears in the Manuel de Géographie, showing Indians, naked except for the signs of their slavery, dragging silver from the bowels of the Potosi mines for transportation to Spain. (How often since has this scene been re-enacted in other colonies?) But "la fureur garotté" of these men, "dont la fermentation est constamment contenue par des polices et des clergés"[28] (P. 112), will eventually burst forth, cracking the new empire wide open and hatching "une énorme vengeance surnoise" which we have not yet seen the end of. Its menacing presence is represented in *Degrés* by the mysterious figure of "le grand Nord-Africain au masque de sparadrap"(P. 376) who appears at intervals, a sinister reminder of France's involvement in North Africa, still very much a reality when *Degrés* was written.

It is clear, then, that the voyage of discovery among the facts which *Degrés* proposes has a historical as well as a geographical dimension. It remains to show that here too, the basic structure is circular in form.

"The Vico Road goes round and round to meet where terms begin."
James Joyce

Taking Pierre Vernier's lesson on the discovery and conquest of America as its "point de départ et d'appui" (P. 175), *Degrés* embraces the history of man. If its circuitous aspect accords with the notion of the periplum, it is also in harmony with a cyclical view of history. Such a view could be said to be typified by the concept of *Renaissance* and the period which has been so named is discussed and defined very early on in the book, while references to it recur throughout.

Further illustrations of the cyclical progress of history are provided by the three great epic poems which appear in the novel: *The Odyssey, The Aeneid* and *The Divina Commedia*, which, between them, trace the progression from the Fall of Troy through the founding of Rome, and its fall as the centre of the Roman Empire, to its rise again as the centre of Christianity, "Quella Roma onde Christo e romano." Similarly, Ulysses is reincarnated, as "sacker of cities", in the *Conquistadores*, as seaman and voyager, in Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus. Republic, Monarchy, Empire, Republic, systems of Government as well as civilisations fall and rise out of each other's ashes, as Denis Régnier might have deduced when he looked up the Lebanese

Republic in Larousse and found the following entry:

> "*République* (la) dialogue de Platon..., ce n'était pas cela,
> *République* (De la), traité politique et philosophique de Cicéron...,
> *République* (De la) ou *Du Gouvernement*, ouvrage de philosophie politique par Bodin, qui était celui-là, Bodin?[29]
> République française, la Republique a été quatre fois proclamé en France..." (P. 102).

Likewise the Greek *polis* re-emerges, centuries later, in the city-states of Dante's Italy.

This cyclical view of history was first propounded by the Italian philosopher, Vico, who thus anticipated many of the developments in nineteenth century thought. A radical critic of rationalism and Descartes, his philosophy might be summed up in the phrase, "The proper study of mankind is man." That is to say, he believed that mathematics was perfectly knowable because made by man, but did not refer to the real, while Nature though it referred to the real was not perfectly knowable, because made by God, and he sought, therefore, a new science which was both perfectly knowable and about the real world. This he found in history, which the Cartesians had written off as unscientific. He believed that in history the greatest degree of certainty could be achieved because it proceeded in a cyclical fashion, whose general laws the historian could determine. This is set out most clearly in his *Scienza Nuova*, of which he wrote three versions.

Although he is probably best remembered for his theory of the *corsi e ricorsi* of history, Vico's philosophy contains many other valuable insights which have subsequently infiltrated the thought of his successors without the source being always identified. His ideas on language and myth and the emphasis he places on the role of imagination in the process of discovery anticipate modern thinking to a remarkable degree and have influenced not only philosophy but literature, mainly through the intermediary of James Joyce, whose *Finnegans Wake* might be called a defence and illustration of Vichian thought.

In one of his essays on Joyce[30], Butor comments at considerable length on Vico (whose work, he too has read) and it is worth examining what he has to say about him, since it may serve, not only to introduce the broad outlines of his philosophy but to reveal the gloss Butor puts on it, in relation to Joyce at least.

According to Butor, Vico was the first since the Greeks to examine the problems of language, myth and the evolution of societies in philosophical terms. Language, which is developed from gesture, is a product of man's fear of Nature, most strongly expressed in the fear of thunder. Together with this fear it is the father of societies, whose establishment is marked by the institution of marriage and burial. These societies are subject to four inevitable stages of development: "théocratie, aristocratie, monarchie, démocratie anarchique,"[31] (R 1, 213), each of which is characterised by a particular language, literature, set of moral values and system of justice, which sanctions its institutions. It is on and out of the ruins of former civilisations that new civilisations are built, only to suffer the same fate in turn. "L'histoire toute entière est ce phénix, cette chute et cette résurrection, cette répetition de cours et de recours (*corsi* e *ricorsi*) qui se répondent et s'enchevêtrent," (R 1, 213-214). Butor also points out that according to Vico "la famille primitive contient en elle la structure de toutes les sociétés futures" and remarks that for Joyce too, it is through this "réalité première" that the mind of man can comprehend "cette grande unité qu'est le monde, et ce grand déchirement." (R 1, 214). He mentions Vico's belief that heroes are "de véritables idéaux poétiques" and quotes from the *Scienza Nuova* what he calls the magnificent conclusion to Vico's commentary on the tale of Hercules:

> "'C'est là un important fragment de cette histoire idéale éternelle dont nous avons dessiné les traits et qu'il faut lire en se servant de notre art critique, des étymologies que nous avons distinguées et du dictionnaire universel que nous avons conçu plus haut.'" (R 1, 214),

adding the comment that Joyce could have uttered the same sentiments after the publication of each new part of his work in progress. Knowing what we do about Butor, it is easy to estimate the pull on his imagination of the ideas of "cette idéale histoire éternelle" and of the "dictionnaire universel".[32]

In my view, *Degrés*, "cette répetition de cours", has a strongly Vichian aura. Its cyclical rhythm is marked out by constantly recurring phrases such as "l'heure tourne", "l'année a tourné" (P. 303), "a tourné la roue de l'année scolaire" (P. 157), while its fundamental movement is one of circulation. Photographs, magazines, homework, *circulate* among the boys who struggle to get a grip on "cette énorme masse d'informations qui circule." (P. 82). But Butor's interest in Vico extends beyond the *corsi e ricorsi* for which he is best remembered, and accordingly, his influence on *Degrés* is not confined to what Joyce called moving in vicious circles.

"Un univers dans un grain de sable."
Butor

In *Degrés*, Butor uses the *réalité première* of the family as a sort of reduction of society in the same way as Joyce does in *Finnegans Wake*, with this difference, however, that he treats of several families and their inter-relationships, whereas Joyce concentrates on the ménage of H. C. Earwicker. In Butor's novel the family appears in nearly all the variants found in Western society. There is the Jouret household which is happy and harmonious, and the Bailly one which is neither; Alain Mouron and his widowed father, Denis Régnier and his divorced mother, with, in the background, his remarried father. There is Jean-Claude Fage's mother who has taken a lover, and M. Hubert, the physics master who is twice married and whose second wife is pregnant with his first child. M. Bonnini loses his wife in the course of the book (he has grown-up children) and finally there is Pierre Vernier who has relations in Paris, but no family of his own.

Both marriage and burial figure prominently in *Degrés*. The marital relationships of Henri Jouret and René Bailly, which represent the extremes of happy and unhappy union are probably those treated in the most detail. A good deal of attention is also paid, however, to Bailly's extra-marital relationship with Claire Duval and to Vernier's involvement with Micheline Pavin, the first of which is disruptive of marriage and does not lead to re-marriage, even after Bailly is divorced, and the second of which seems to be tending toward marriage, but with a certain reserve on Vernier's part, and which is cut off abruptly by his presumed death. If we take Vico's view that the institution of the family, ensuring the legitimacy of children, marked the emergence of men from bestiality and the founding of society, then its growing instability may augur the disintegration of society as it is now constituted. This would seem to be the suggestion in *Degrés*. As far as family relationships are concerned, however, Butor's emphasis is not on paternity. The triadic relationships whose prevalence prompts Vernier to begin writing, are, as he has pointed out "...uniquement obliques: relations de cousins à cousins, d'oncles à neveux etc.". That is to say that they are relationships of the *second degré*, and hence their importance is more structural than social.[33]

The ritual visits paid by nearly all the families in the novel to the graves of their deceased members on *Le Jour des Morts* serves to introduce burial. Again, perhaps the fact that the rite is not universally observed is an indication of a weakening of the ties on which society is founded. Madame Bonnini, the wife of the Italian master dies during the book, as does Francis Hutter's grandfather, whose funeral, which takes place in the provinces, is described.

Other family rites, notably the celebration of birthdays, are frequently described in *Degrés*.[34] The birthdays of Pierre Eller, Pierre Vernier and Henri Jouret are all featured, as well as that of little Agnès Bailly, this last the occasion for a misleading display of family unity. Eller's birthday is an important date in the novel because Vernier determines to begin writing on that day; it is also the day of the *leçon-pivot*. On Vernier's own birthday he lunches with the Ellers and is required to "souffler les trente-cinq bougies" (P. 357). He remarks that "... on est très respectueux des traditions rue du Canivet," (ibid.), a phrase which recalls a law proposed by Cicero and quoted by Vico: *Sacra familiaria perpetua manento*, "let sacred family rites by maintained." The ritual of family meals, particularly the mid-day meal, over which the father presides, angrily rebuking any sons who are late, is frequently described in *Degrés*.

These examples should suffice to bring out the importance of the *foyer* in the sense of household or family, in Butor's novel. Vico gives us the origin of the term in the phrase *focus laris*, the hearth where the father sacrificed to the family gods, the *lar* of each house being the god of the fire and Butor continues to emphasise its ritual aspects, though with some interesting variations.

Vico's ideas about language are closely related to his theory of history. He believed that language, no less than myth and tradition, was a repository of man's changing world-view. Consequently, expressions of speech which have become metaphors would once have represented the terms in which man apprehended the world, "made sense" of his experience, and are, on that account, invaluable indices of the mental processes and outlooks and of the actual living conditions obtaining in different periods. It is remarkable to what extent Vico anticipated modern thought in holding this view and everything we have seen so far regarding Butor's attitude to language indicates that it is the same as Vico's.

Language plays a more important part in *Degrés* even than in the first three novels, in that it is presented as an entity independent of the texture of the book itself. That is to say, we are asked to consider language *qua* language, by means of the difficulties the students encounter in the texts they are required to study. There are quotations from Renaissance French, from Shakespearian English, deliberate archaisms like the word *rime* in Coleridge's poem, excerpts from Greek, Latin and Italian texts. Each of these instances displays language as conveying a definite historical and local colour. Indeed Butor goes out of his way to make the point that very often old texts in one's own language are as difficult to understand properly as those written in another tongue.

The boys frequently skimp their preparation of Rabelais, say, in favour of Greek or Latin, in the mistaken belief that because Rabelais is a French writer he will not pose serious problems. They fail to realise that the French of the Renaissance was expressive of a world-view very different from their own, bearing out one of Vico's axioms, which he says "... points to the inexhaustible source of all the errors about the principles of humanity that have been adopted by entire nations and by all the scholars.", that is:

> "that whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand."35

But, as always with Butor, very sensitive use is made of popular language in *Degrés* as well. One example from everyday speech of an expression which has, so to speak, lapsed into a metaphor is *pendaison de crémaillère* (P.333) which also fits in very well with the discussion of the *foyer* above.

The expression now means a house-warming, and is used in the novel to describe such a celebration at the Daval's new apartment. Literally, it means the hanging of a pothook over the fire and refers to a ritual which was meaningful when the fire was the focal point of the household. Significantly, when the Davals are moving in, they measure the fire-place, but Madame Daval remarks: "... elle est affreuse cette cheminée, mais s'il y a un rude hiver, on peut être content de l'avoir." (P. 86). It is evident that in the twentieth century the fire has become peripheral to family life. *Pendaison de crémaillère* refers to a custom which is now defunct and illustrates how the word *foyer*, in the sense of "Lieu ou se réunit, ou habite la famille, la famille elle-même, le groupement familial," has gradually moved further away from the reality of the hearth.

In fact the word *foyer* has a great variety of meanings and the manner in which Butor exploits these in *Degrés* illustrates not only the reflected symbolism to which I have referred but also the exercise of *l'imagination méthodique* which is central to Butor's thought and to Vico's too.

One of the key passages in *Degrés* hinges on the word *foyer*. Meditating on the interplay of imaginative reconstruction and documented fact (an eminently Vichian notion) in his description of a class, Pierre Vernier is thinking that because he knows Henri Jouret fairly intimately, he is able to say with certainty that on Wednesday, October 20th between the hours of three and four, Jouret is talking about "*Iphigénie*, Acte I, scene 2," with his *première moderne*. He concludes:

> "Littéralement, c'est tout ce que je sais, et si je veux poursuivre ma description, je suis obligé d'imaginer; et je suis obligé de pousser plus loin ma description, sinon dans ce cas-là, du moins dans d'autres cas, pour que puisse se former en toi une représentation." (P. 116).

But as soon as he has written "C'est tout ce que je sais", he realises that that is not strictly accurate. Because of his friendship with Jouret, he knows what his tone of voice will be, what kind of gestures he will make. He can *see* and *hear* him questioning the students:

> "Donc, non seulement je suis obligé d'imaginer pour toi, mais nécessairement j'imagine pour moi; ces mots que j'ai écrits ou bien que je prononce, en disant 'Je ne sais que cela', ces mots mêmes n'ont de sens pour moi que parce que je sais bien autre chose, que bien autre chose est présent à divers degrés d'historicité;
>
> ce fait qui est comme un clou fixant mon texte et l'empechant de s'égarer, il n'a finalement d'existence pour moi, pour toi, pour nous tous, que parce qu'il apparait comme un foyer au milieu de toute une zone d'imaginations et de probabilités," (P. 117).

Robert gives several definitions for the word *foyer*, as:

> "I, Lieu ou l'on fait du feu, II, Par extension Lieu servant d'abri, d'asile..., III, Par analogie (avec le feu qui rayonne de l'énergie). ^{I}Lieu, point d'ou rayonne la chaleur, la lumière. Par anal. *Géom.* Dans une courbe *du second degré*, point 'tel qu'il existe un rapport constant entre les distances de chacun des points de la courbe au foyer ... et à une droite fixe appellée directrice.' 2 *Fig.* Point central, d'òu provient quelque chose." (Italics added) 36

In *Degrés* all of these facets of the word seem to have been taken into account but for the moment I will deal only with those which are relevant to the passage quoted above.

The dominant idea conveyed by the word *foyer* in the present context is that of *focus*, in the sense in which it is understood in Geometry and in Optics; that is, one of the "points from which distances to any point of given curve are connected by linear relation", hence, in Optics, "the point at which rays meet after reflection or refraction", "point from which rays appear to proceed, point at which object must be situated for image given by lens to be well-defined". But the optical sense carries with it the implication of luminosity, and that too is present in Butor's use of the word *foyer*. The fact that Vernier knows the subject matter of Jouret's class is the *foyer* or focus. But this fact does not exist in a vacuum, as he realises the instant he says, "C'est tout ce que je sais". It is the focus of a number of other facts which could be said to form the "given curve" mentioned above. For example, because he knows Jouret's voice, his habitual gestures, his cast of mind, and because he knows Racine's *Iphigénie* and is more or less familiar with the age in which it was written and also with the original Greek setting, and because, in addition, he is aware that the *première moderne* will be unfamiliar with this Greek dimension (since they do not study the classics), the statement that during the hours from three to four on October 20th, Henri Jouret is studying *Iphigénie* with the *première moderne, comes into focus.* It is the surrounding "zone d'imaginations et de probabilités" that gives meaning to the statement.

But the focus is also "the point from which rays appear to proceed" and the fact that Vernier knows what Jouret is doing at a given moment allows him to project into areas about which he does not have definite information, proceeding this time from the fact to the "zone d'imaginations et de probabilités". Hence he can surmise with a reasonable degree of certitude that at some point during the lesson Jouret will be asking: "'un tel, pouvez-vous me dire où se trouve exactement l'Aulide?'" (P.117). A further quotation from the sentence under examination (one of the most important in *Degrés*) may serve to clarify the discussion. Continuing from where I left off:

> "et cette imagination est d'autant plus forte et d'autant plus juste que je suis capable de relier ce moment de la vie de ton oncle, par des catégories grammaticales ou autres, à d'autres moments,
> cet homme à d'autres hommes, ce lieu à d'autres lieux, cette citation au reste de la tragédie, cette tragédie aux autres de Racine, ce fragment de culture à d'autres,
> apportant un peu de lumière au milieu de cette confusion énorme ou nous nous débattons, un peu de lumière qui se projette sur cette instant, qui le rend visible, observable, qui se réfléchit sur cet instant pour venir éclaircir un peu l'obscur présent (c'était le mercredi 20 octobre)," (P. 117).

The verb *relier* suggests the "linear relation" referred to above, while projection and reflection are connected with the notion of focus.

It might be objected that this particular connotation of the word *foyer* is too specialised for the Common Reader to grasp; but Butor has taken the precaution of providing a physical experiment illustrating *foyer*, in this sense, at the beginning of the book:

> "Ton frère aîné, dans l'ampithéâtre, tous rideaux fermés, regardait dans l'obscurité M. Hubert démontrer l'existence d'un foyer pour les miroirs sphériques:
> sortant d'un projecteur enfermé dans une boîte de métal, deux rayons parallèles illuminant la poussière de craie qu'il faisait tomber de ses mains, se réfléchissaient sur une lame de métal concave, et se rejoignaient." (P. 33).

In any case, even if the reader misses this, he will at least understand *foyer* as a source of light, so that the passage on page 117 will not remain totally obscure. But Butor pursues the geometrical analogy on the next page, when he ~~has~~ Vernier declare:

> "Pour t'aider à te représenter ce que tu as été toi-même, donc d'où tu viens, donc dans quelle direction tu vas, quel est le vecteur de ton présent, il me faudrait faire un grand effort d'imagination méthodique déjà, de reconstruction, d'hypothèse, que je me mette à ta place, que j'essaie de me voir moi-même par tes yeux, que je te donne la parole par conséquent, faisant basculer l'équilibre de ce récit." (P. 118). [37]

Again, he had prepared us for the word *vecteur* on page 69: "M. Hubert parlait de point d'application, d'intensité, de vecteur."

It is significant that although Vico believed that only God can fully know the workings of the universe, yet that does not mean that it cannot be known at all, in Vico's sense, for we are not confined to the role of passive spectators in the examination of the phenomena to be studied:

> "Rather, through the construction of experiments performed in the light of hypotheses, we to some degree 'imitate nature', creating and recreating the conditions under which natural processes of determinate kinds may be observed to occur. As Vico put it, 'The things which are proved in physics are those to which we can perform something similar'." (*Opere*, Vol.I, Pp. 136-137).

This casts an interesting light on the number of experiments in Physics which are referred to in *Degrês* and also on the investigative methods of Vernier himself, so firmly based, as we have seen, on hypothesis and reconstruction. An example of this is provided by the difficulty he has in accounting for the activities of M. Moret, the gym teacher, to whom he is virtually a stranger.

In contrast with the period from 3-4 on Wednesday, October 20th and the activity of Henri Jouret during that time, the hour from 2-3 on Tuesday, October 12th is a blank for Vernier as far as M. Moret is concerned. This time he really does know next to nothing about him; "Est'il marié?" he wonders. It is impossible therefore to perform the same kind of imaginative operation as in the case of *l'Oncle Henri:*

> "Vois-tu, si je laisse cette case à peu près vide, c'est que j'ai trop peu d'éléments pour que mon imagination se dirige dans tel sens plutôt que dans tel autre, mais tu sais bien qu'il aurait fallu la remplir," (P. 90).

Mention is made several times in *Degrés* of Mendéliéev's classification of gases. In the Physics theatre there is a "grand panneau presentant la classification de Mendéliéev: 'hydrogène, hélium, lithium, bore...'" (P. 19). According to Larousse, Mendéliéev:

> "... est surtout l'auteur de la classification périodique des éléments chimiques ... il a eu l'idée, dans ce tableau, de ménager des *cases vides*, devant correspondre à des corps inconnus dont il pouvait prévoir les propriétés; cette hypothèse s'est trouvée rapidement confirmée par les découvertes du gallium, du scandium et du germanium."

The connection between the operations of Vernier and Mendéliéev is clear. In each case it is a question of *imagination methodique*, that is of intuitionalism based on an existing model. The *grand panneau* is *Degrés mise-en-abyme*: an example of internal symbolism.

As well as the *Scienza Nuova*, Vico wrote a treatise on pedagogy called *De Nostri Temporis Studiorum Ratione*.[38] One of its most important features is the *verum ipsum factum*, truth is deed, or to put it in other words: we can only know what we can do or make. Bertrand Russell gives as an example of this, the understanding of music. It is not enough to listen to a piece of music in order to understand it thoroughly; "...we must, as it were, reconstruct it by reading or playing the score, even if this is done with a relative lack of expert skill."[39] It seems to me that this is highly relevant to writers like Butor who demand from their readers an effort tantamount to recreation. The emphasis on reconstruction is also a marked internal feature of Butor's novels and is closely associated with the act of appropriation. Consider Revel's effort to reconstruct his time-table in order to seize his year in Bleston. This is raised to a still higher power in *Degrés*, which is concerned with *learning* in the primary sense. Vernier is attempting to reconstruct what it is to be a student in the *second degré*, for his nephew, so that he will be able eventually to take possession of it. Because of his knowledge of the boy, Vernier writes:

> "... je puis te remettre à ta place au milieu de ce que tu pouvais voir, te redire avec un degré d'approximation suffisant ce que tu entendais ...
>
> de telle sorte que tu sois capable de te reconnaître ou au contraire, ce qui serait encore mieux, que tout à coup un démenti de détail surgisse en toi au cours de ta lecture, faisant se dresser par conséquent devant toi tout un pan de ce passé, de cet enseignement qui sera passé, dont je voudrais que tu prennes enfin cette possession hors de ta portée pour l'instant." (P. 119).

The theory that truth is deed provides a reason why mathematical truths are known with certainty, for mathematical science was made by man himself by setting up rules in an abstract and arbitrary manner. But Nature was made by God and therefore only He can understand Her. If man wishes to know about Nature he should adopt an empirical approach, proceeding by observation and experiment, rather than by mathematical procedure. Vico is opposed to the rationalism of Descartes (a strong influence on French education) which eschews imagination, regarding it as a source of confusion. Vico, on the other hand, emphasises its role in the process of discovery. According to Russell:

> "One valuable hint that might arise from all this, is the fact that the rationalist account deals with science as a finished product, and presents it in an expository order. The account implicit in Vico shows science in the making and adopts the order of invention." [40]

When this is taken in conjunction with Vico's emphasis on the active and reconstructive element in the knowing process, we have something very close to what Butor calls *l'imagination méthodique*, of which *Degrés* is an excellent example, in operation.

This imagination is not fantasy, [41] but rather, to return to an image I used earlier, "a voyage of discovery among the facts". Pierre Deguise is under a misapprehension therefore when he attributes Vernier's failure to a lack of imagination:

> "Pierre Vernier s'obstine à retrouver le temps vécu par les méthodes de l'enquête historique. Il a vu trop tard que la vérité n'est pas dans le fait soigneusement établi, isolé, et par là appauvri et désséché, mais dans l'imagination, principe de dialectique, principe de vie qui relie les hommes entre les hommes et les hommes aux choses." [42]

The method of historical inquiry which Vernier pursues and which Butor recommends to us if we wish to re-appropriate the past is precisely one which incorporates the dialectical principle of the imagination; the one in short, proposed by Giambattista Vico, whose theory of history looked forward to that of Hegel.

Finally, to return to the starting point of this discussion, Joyce's interest in Vico, it should be noted that the notion of focus, as described here, has a good deal in common with the Joycean Epiphany, which is achieved when "the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point..." so that "The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted seems to us radiant."[43] (It is interesting that epiphany in the strict sense means revelation of a divinity and that the word *foyer* has its origin in the *focus laris*). In the context of *Degrés* one could say that the fact that Vernier knows that Henri Jouret is teaching *Iphigénie* is *epiphanised*. Its "parts", that is the factors that make up its historical context, both distant (i.e. pertaining to seventeenth century France and Ancient Greece) and proximal (pertaining to Vernier's personal knowledge of Jouret), are adjusted to the special point, and "it seems to us radiant": the effort of the imagination which has resulted in that adjustment "apportant un peu de lumière ... qui se réfléchit sur cet instant pour venir éclaircir un peu l'obscur présent". *Degrés* itself is the adjusting of the parts of Vernier's pivotal lesson on the discovery and conquest of America until its radiance illuminates the history of the Western World, revealing the vector of our present, which is what Vico claimed the historian could do, by discovering the general laws of the historical process, and in terms of it, explaining why things have turned out as they have and will continue in a predictable manner.

The following sentence from Butor's essay, "Recherches sur la technique du roman," suggests itself as an appropriate conclusion to this discussion:

> "Chaque événement apparaît comme pouvant être le point d'origine et de convergence de plusieurs suites narratives, comme un foyer dont la puissance est plus ou moins grande par rapport à ce qui l'entoure. La narration n'est plus une ligne, mais une surface dans laquelle nous isolons un certain nombre de lignes, de points, ou de groupements remarquables." (R 2, 92).

It is evident how this applies to the two central events of *Degrés*, Vernier's History lesson, and its subject, the discovery and conquest of America, each of which, like Henri Jouret's lesson on *Iphigénie*, is "le point d'origine et de convergence de plusieurs suites narratives", the one on a microcosmic, the other on a macrocosmic scale. The problem which *Degrés* posed for Butor, apparently, was how to call a halt to the *suites narratives* once they had been set in motion.

> "Dans *Degrés* il y a la mise en branle d'une sorte de machinerie descriptive... Un des problèmes c'était de trouver un moyen d'arrêter cette machinerie... C'est cela le problème fondamental de *Degrés*, trouver une raison valable pour arrêter cette description."
>
> Butor

Confronted with the task of giving a reasonably adequate account of *Degrés*, the critic might echo Butor's words. Some of its facets have been dealt with, many more remain to be explored. But rather than attempting to exhaust the novel's possibilities (supposing that could be done), the object of this study has been to draw attention to the richness of this book, which has been described as "un livre dechiqueté, parfois aride, presque laborieux." and "... moins riche de résonances"[44] than *L'Emploi du temps*.

Once its multifaceted nature is appreciated, *Degrés* invites a thematic approach, as Butor himself has hinted:

> "Dans *Degrés* il y avait un certain nombre de classes, d'heures de classe, pendant lesquelles on parlait des Etats-Unis; dans le cours de géographie, il est question des Etats-Unis, on peut étudier, on peut chercher comment sont présentés les Etats-Unis dans *Degrés*." (Entretiens, 15).

One could equally well study how imperialism, or religion, or education, or the family is presented in *Degrés*; or yet again Greece, or the *Odyssey*, or the epic hero, or Racine, or Coleridge, or indeed any combination of these, and more. The exploration of these themes would furnish matter for another study, if not for several.

"Une fois publié, un texte est comme un appareil dont chacun peut se servir à sa guise et selon ses moyens.",[45] Valéry wrote, using a mechanistic analogy similar to Butor's. I have tried to show the inner workings of the *appareil* which is *Degrés* and how they are in communication with the mesh of our daily experience. Some critics, notably in Italy, are willing to grant the existence of an intricate *appareil* in Butor's works, but not that it is connected in any real way with "life". There is a condemnation of what is called, in the magnificent Italian phrase "la feticizzazione tecnicistica contemporanea" and Butor is suspected of having revealed "una pericolosa propensione all'oggettivazione feticistica, al tecnicismo".[46] Is *Degrés*, described by its author as "une machinerie descriptive", with its emphasis on physical experiment, on machines (*la machine d'Atwood*, "la machine du General Morin pour vérifier la loi de la chute des corps" [P. 30]) and on geometrical figures (the triangle, the circle) open to these charges?

I think not, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the notion of a machine need not be pejorative. Butor describes *Finnegans Wake* as "une machine à provoquer et faciliter mes propres rêves". Although an elaborately worked-out technique went into its making (as in the case of *Degrés*) the effects it produces exceed the bounds of the mechanical. Reading the book involves seeing how the machine works and to do that we must bring our entire cultural background into play. Seeing how it works, *démonter le mécanisme*,[47] is Vico's *ipsum factum*, the active reconstruction that leads to appropriation. There is no attempt by either Joyce or Butor to force contradictory tumultuous human nature into the straight-jacket of an absolute truth. Were they to do so, it would be in direct contradiction to the beliefs of the man who influenced both *Finnegans Wake* and *Degrés*, Giambattista Vico, the proponent of a modern humanism which aims at a fruitful co-existence of the sciences and the *humaniora*.

Unlike many men of letters, Butor does not reject the world of technology. The fact that so many people do so, to the extent of organising their lives around machinery about whose method of functioning they are content to remain ignorant, may be an important factor in the widespread feeling of alienation in our society. Arguably, a machine functions *mechanically* when no attention is paid to how it works. We must appropriate our world, and that includes its machines.

Finally, given that *Degrés*, like *L'Emploi du temps*, is the record of a failure (Vernier's book is literally the death of him), are we to conclude that Butor's novel, its reflection, also fails; that any phenomenological description is doomed to do so? And if that is the case, why bother writing such descriptions at all? Butor hinted at the answer in *L'Emploi du temps*, when he wrote, "Je vais remettre le négatif entre les pages du roman" (P.204). Sartre, speaking about the inevitable failure of the writer to Madeleine Chapsal, said:

> "On *ne peut pas* réussir puisqu'on a posé l'échec au départ ... Si les défaites sont inscrites méthodiquement dans le négatif qu'on livre au public, elles indiquent ce qui devait être fait. Et c'est le spectateur qui est le vrai sculpteur dans le vide, qui lit le livre entre les lignes."48

This chapter began by emphasising the pivotal nature of *Degrés* and proceeded to examine the circular movement which characterises the novel. An important feature of pivotal movement is that it takes place on one plane, and it is on this principle that the mobile works. Although other considerations were, no doubt, involved, this fact is one indication that *Mobile* follows logically on *Degrés*.

[1] Michel Butor, *Degrés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

[2] Pierre-Henri Simon, *Le Monde*, 22 avril 1964. See also Bernard Pivot, *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 19 nov. 1960, No. 761, p. 3 col. 1. "Il y a quelques mois, Michel Butor, l'écrivain de *La Modification* (Prix Renaudot 1957), publiait son quatrième roman *Degrés*. Ces degrés-là la plupart des critiques les ont gravis péniblement et en ont déconseillé l'escalade à leurs lecteurs."

Claude Mauriac, in one of the few favourable reviews, wrote of the critical reaction to *Degrés*: "Ne disons au moins pas de mal des livres que nous ne lisons pas. Nous n'avons pas le droit d'en user si légèrement avec des écrivains qui ont mis tant d'eux-mêmes et du monde, avec courage et persévérance dans leur oeuvre." *Le Figaro*, 13 avril 1960, p. 14, col. 6.

Eight years later, *Degrés* was being condemned as a failure in *La Nouvelle Critique* because its attempt at describing a collectivity was tainted by surviving loyalties to individualism. See Catherine Claude, "De 'Passage de Milan' à 6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde ." La Forme de l'invention littéraire chez Butor." pp. 45-51, *La Nouvelle Critique*, 17 Oct. 1968.

[3] The word *pivot* figures prominently in Butor's vocabulary. For example, there is the "panneau-pivot" of the Harvey Tapestries (ET, 230), "la journée-pivot" (12th October) and "L'heure-pivot" (3-4) of *Degrés*. Some critics regard *Mobile* as the pivot on which Butor's opus turns: see Donald B. Rice, "Etude Critique des romans de Michel Butor," DAI 31:401A (Wis.). I disagree. *Mobile* is the result of a movement begun in *Degrés*.

[4] Claudine Jardin, "Michel Butor lance l'Opéra-Mobile," *Le Figaro*, 14 février 1966, p. 16, col. 6.

[5] Hubert Juin, "Une interview de M. Butor," *Les Lettres Françaises*, 807, 14-20 janvier, 1960, p. 5.

With regard to the phrase: "Il y a un décor: la classe" it should be noted that there is a certain ambiguity about the exact nature of Vernier's project. It is not quite clear whether *classe* refers to the hour's history lesson or to the class of boys. The word also carries the connotation of *social class*, as well as class meaning type.

Butor has pointed out to Charbonnier that *Répertoire* and *Degrés* are "tout à fait liés". *Répertoire* (table, list, index, catalogue) also implies classification and students in France often employ alphabetically indexed note-books called *répertoires* for recording vocabularies.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Jean Gaugeard, "Michel Butor: *Répertoire II*," *Les Lettres Françaises*, 1022, 26 mars 1964.

[8] Pierre Daix, "Avec Michel Butor," *Les Lettres Françaises*, 1037 9-15 juillet, 1964, pp. 6-7.

This was not clear to some critics when the book first appeared. See Matthieu Galey, "Michel Butor: un travail de sape," *Arts*, 758, jan. 1960, p. 4. "Qu'importe, par exemple l'aperçu qu'ouvre ce roman sur'l'espace mental de l'enseignement secondaire'? Michel Butor lui-même n'est pas dupe de cette mauvaise querelle. Ecrit-on un bon roman pour réformer les programmes des lycées et des collèges? Heureusement son livre vaut mieux que cela."

[9] The word *échelle* may be an instance of a double pun, since it means scale, as well as ladder. Pierre Vernier may be named after the inventor of the Vernier Scale (Pierre Vernier, c. 1580-1637), which enables either linear or angular magnitudes to be read with a degree of accuracy many times greater than is possible with a scale as ordinarily divided and sub-divided.

[10] *Degrés*, p. 11 and p. 112.

[11] See Butor, *Essais sur le roman*, p. 14, where he refers to "une transformation de la notion même de roman, qui évolue très lentement mais inévitablement ... vers une espèce nouvelle de poésie à la fois épique et didactique." Georges Raillard, particularly, has insisted on the didactic quality of Butor's writing, see "L'Exemple", postface to the 10/18 edition of *L'Emploi du temps*.

[12] Interview with Pierre Daix.

[13] Hubert Juin, op. cit.

[14] *Degrés*, p. 64. Vernier's programme extends, in fact, beyond the *second degré*, to cover the subject matter taught by Jouret and Bailly in the *premier degré*, see p. 250.

[15] The new regime devised for Gargantua is the subject of one of Henri Jouret's classes: an example of the mise-en-abyme which is a frequent procedure in *Degrés* and elsewhere in Butor's work. See reference to Lucien Dällenbach, *Le Livre et ses miroirs*, above.

[16] This enumeration takes various forms: the run-down made by the students of the homework they have to do, or the interrogation in class, or the preparation, confronting the teachers, e.g., p. 372.

[17] Mallarmé, "Hérésies Artistiques L'Art pour Tous", *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945) pp. 257-260.

[18] "Petite Croisière Préliminaire à un Reconnaissance de L'Archipel Joyce," *Répertoire I*, pp. 295-218.

"Esquisse d'un Seuil pour Finnegan," ibid., pp. 219-233.

"La tentative Poétique d'Ezra Pound," ibid., pp. 234-249.

[19] Ezra Pound, *How to Read*, (London: Harmsworth, MCMXXXI) pp. 25-26.

[20] Butor frequently uses the words *noeuds, nodales* in connection with literature and has compared his own work with a tree branching out. Another arboretal image in his criticism is the phrase "spore de ce thalle" (R 2, 25).

[21] Michel Butor, *Essai sur les essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

[22] See *Degrés*, p. 12 and p. . The title of the essay on Joyce seems to refer to the metaphor sustaining Keats's sonnet.

[23] See too p. 171 "... cette constellation dont on ne pouvait raisonnablement espérer qu'elle se reproduirait une année prochaine."

[24] Hugh Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1951) pp. 102-103.

[25] Paul Claudel, *Le livre de Christophe Colomb*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1935) p. [illegible]76.

Butor has acknowledged the influence of Claudel on his work. It is interesting that *Degrés* is set up typographically in units resembling Claudel's *versets*. The sentences are just as long as in *L'Emploi du temps*, but the decreased density of the page does make for easier reading. Butor, ever sensitive to the physical aspect of a book, has advanced the quest for greater legibility as one of the reasons for the division of the sentences in *Degrés*, but he also saw them as representing a rhythmic value. He says to Hubert Juin:

> "Le livre est fait par cubes, ou, peut-on dire également, par strophes. Les paragraphes détachés les une des autres permettent mieux au lecteur de suivre les aventures rigoureuses d'une phrase qui sans cesse passe d'un plan à un autre plan."

In Claudel's play, too, the unfortunate consequences of the discovery of America are emphasised. Ironically, the man whose name means "porteur du Christ" and the dove of peace was responsible for the re-introduction of slavery into the world, according to Claudel.

Christopher Columbus is reportedly one of Butor's favourite historical characters. Perhaps partly because he too is named after a bird, perhaps because as Jean-Louis Barrault has pointed out, Columbus's lot, like the writer's, is *l'incompréhension et l'ingratitude. (Cahiers Renault-Barrault* 27 bis.) In any case Butor would seem to share his consuming desire to "réunir la terre".

[26] The *fleuve boueux et tourbillonnant* is probably connected with Ulysses's ordeal by water before landing on Phaeacia (the passage of the *Odyssey* to which reference is made throughout the book). Baffled by the impossibly rocky coast and almost dashed to pieces by the violent waves, he prays to a river-god to allow him to enter the mouth of a river and his prayer is answered. Similarly turbulent waters, filled with *feuilles mortes* threaten the safety of Alain Mouron in one of his dreams which is prompted precisely by his fear that he will be submerged by the *énorme masse d'informations* that he is required to absorb in the *lycée.*

[27] Another link between *Degrés* and Pound is suggested by the emphasis the book places on the rise of capitalism and banking as the result of the mining of precious metals in America; in other words, Usury, the source, according to Pound, of most of the world's ills.

[28] The situation of the schoolboys in *Degrés* might well be described in these same terms. They too are *mineurs* in another sense.

[29] Jean Bodin is mentioned twice in *Degrés*. See p. 181: "... de la transformation des sociétés européennes après la découverte de l'Amérique, de l'élévation du coût de la vie, citation de Jean Bodin: 'Il est incroyable et toutefois véritable qu'il est venu du Pérou depuis l'an 1533 ... plus de cent millions d'or et deux fois autant d'argent!...',". (181).

A sixteenth century philosopher and economist (1530-1596), his principle works were : *La réponse aux paradoxes de M. de Malestroit* (1566), a study of inflation, whose origin he traces to the abundance of gold and silver in circulation as a result of European exploitation of the *Potosi mines* (the quotation above is from this work), *Methodes ad facilem historiarum cognititionem* (1566), *La République* (1566), considered to be his *chef-d'oeuvre*. A supporter of absolute monarchy, he yet denied the right of kings to their subjects' goods and to the imposition of taxes without the consent of the estates general.

Bodin is mentioned several times in Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, and a whole chapter (3) of Section XIII is devoted to the "Refutation of the Principles of Political Theory as Represented by the System of Jean Bodin."

Bodin, connected with the Potosi mines, with a theory of history and with Vico, is typical of the kind of *noeud* out of which Butor's works are constructed.

[30] "Petite croisière préliminaire à une reconnaissance de l'archipel Joyce", pp. 213-214.

[31] In fact Vico distinguishes 3 broad kinds of governments: theocratic, aristocratic and "human governments", that is, where all are equal under the law. Curiously, Vico claims that in a monarchy this is also the case, since the monarchs "are themselves the only bearers of any distinction in civil nature" (S.N. Section 927).

Vico's quarrel with Bodin centred around the order of evolution of societies which Bodin held to be: monarchy, tyranny, popular commonwealth, and finally aristocracy.

It is difficult to account for Butor's distortion of Vico since the latter's work is as strongly oriented to the rule of three as Dante's, or *Degrés*.

[32] "Vico speaks several times of a Mental Dictionary... of which he gives another example in this edition (473-482) and of which he says he makes continual use. But the Dictionary itself remains a project barely begun." Bergin and Fisch, Introduction to *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, revised translation of the Third Edition (1744) (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968).

[33] The class studied by Vernier is of course the *second degré*.

Questioned about his views on Zola, Butor said: "Tout l'ensemble est fondé sur le thème de l'héredité et, d'autre part, par les liens de famille constituant les articulations de l'oeuvre. De cela on a donné des interprétations pseudo-scientifiques. Mais le thème de la famille me semble devoir être étudié comme *une fonction structurale* à l'interieur même de l'oeuvre, c'est-à-dire d'un point de vue non plus pseudo-scientifique, mais poétique." "Pourquoi ce retour à Zola? Trois devant Zola" *Arts-Loisirs*, octobre 1966, pp. 28-31.

[34] Birthdays also denote the passing or the "turn" of the year. See below.

[35] *Scienza Nuova*, Section 526.

[36] It seems significant that Butor, speaking of the difficulty of bringing Vernier's investigation to a halt, said: "Un moyen d'arrêter cela c'est comme une surface courbe qui part, et alors cette surface va être sectionnée par une autre surface." F. C. St. Aubyn "Entretien avec Michel Butor", P. 20. If it should be objected that these mathematical analogies are unlikely, it is worth pointing out that Butor, under Gaston Bachelard, presented a *diplôme d'études supérieures* on *Les Mathématiques et l'idée de nécessité*. See Paul Guth, "1926-1957: ou les Modifications de Michel Butor", *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 7 decembre 1957.

[37] Patrick Gardiner, "Vico, Giambattista," *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Vol. 8 (New York: MacMillan, 1961) pp. 247-251.

[38] G. Vico, 1709. *On the Study Methods of our Time*, Giambattista Vico, trans. with an introduction and notes by Elio Gianturco (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1965).

[39] Bertrand Russell, *Wisdom of the West*, ed. Paul Foulkes, (New York: Crescent Books, no date). P 207

[40] Ibid., p. 208.

[41] See Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: O.U.P., 1907) Vol. 1, p. 202.

"The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."

Coleridge is mentioned several times in *Degrés* and is known to have read Vico's work.

[42] Pierre Deguise, "Michel Butor et le 'nouveau roman'," *French Review*, XXXV, December 1961, pp. 155-162, p. 161.

[43] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York, 1963) p. 213.

See the interesting article by Emily Zants, "The Relation of Epiphany to Description in the Modern French Novel". *Comparative Literature Studies*, V. 3, September 1968, pp. 317-328, although she fails to treat the word *foyer* with precision and her misapplication of the word "radiate" is puzzling.

The word *foyer* could easily qualify as one of what J.-P. Richard would call the *métaphores obsédantes* in Butor's work. Apart from the instances already mentioned, it occurs on page 130 of *Degrés*, "foyers de déchirement", in *La Modification*, "ce foyer capital d'emerveillements et d'obscurités" (p. 229) and twice in the essay on *Finnegans Wake*, "Nous avons un texte a deux foyers de signification" (p. 224) and "Chacune est un foyer d'irradiation" (p. 230). One of the most interesting instances of the word occurs in the essay on Victor Hugo, "Germe d'Encre" (R 3, 218): "Surtout il y a certains livres auxquels il revient sans cesse; dans cet océan de lecture, il y a des noeuds et des foyers, il y a des détroits, des passages que l'on est forcé de reprendre pour aller découvrir d'autres mers."

[44] Jean-Luc Seylaz, "La tentative romanesque de Michel Butor de *L'Emploi du temps* à *Degrés*," Etudes de Lettres, Série 2, Lausanne, 3, no. 4, octobre-décembre 1960, 209-221, p. 221.

[45] Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, 1, (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 1507.

[46] Enzo Paci, "Nota su Robbe-Grillet, Butor e la fenomenologia", *Aut Aut*, 69, Maggio 1962, pp. 234-237.

[47] This phrase, applied in the novel to Denis Eller's pick-up (p. 185) may be a typical Butorian hint.

[48] Chapsal, p. 218.

New Departures

> "Il est évident qu'il est très difficile de classer mes derniers livres dans les genres littéraires habituels. Ils comportent des éléments romanesques, mais ils sont si loin de ce qu'on entend généralement par ce nom qu'on ne peut plus les appeler ainsi. Toutefois, j'ai l'impression d'être en continuité directe avec tous mes livres, notamment avec *Degrés*."
>
> Butor

There are few writers whose work invites such a neat division as Butor's. It was Jean Roudaut who coined the phrases *Romanesque I* to cover the period up to and including *Degrés*, and *Romanesque 2*[1] to designate those subsequent works which, as Butor says, defy classification among *les genres littéraires habituels*. It is important to note, however, that Roudaut limited the application of the term *Romanesque 2* to four specific works: *Réseau Aérien, Mobile, Description de San Marco* and *6,810,000 Litres d'eau par seconde*. Writing in 1966, he does not include *Histoire Extraordinaire* (1961) nor *Illustrations* (1964), which leads one to wonder how many, if any, of the words subsequently published by Butor would fit into the *Romanesque 2* category, supposing that the term carries more than chronological implications. In their eagerness to seize on a terminology which seemed to provide an elegant and economical solution to the difficulties of classifying Butor's later works, critics have not, it seems to me, examined Roudaut's phraseology sufficiently closely. I propose now to do so, before proceeding to an examination of those four works which he grouped under the category of *Romanesque 2*.

What are we to understand by the word *romanesque*? Its primary sense, in general usage, is probably "romantic"; by extension, the kind of character or event one expects to find in a novel. Pierre-Henri Simon, who has not distinguished himself by the perspicacity of his Butor criticism, did, however, remark pertinently, in one of his articles, on the curious way in which, "Par une évolution paradoxale le roman a fini en effet par faire son domaine de ce qui nie précisément le sens de l'adjectif romanesque."[2] We might ask how far Roudaut was conscious of this paradox when he was categorising Butor's work, that is to say, is he thinking of *romanesque* in the sense of romantic, emphasising the fictional aspect of the novel, or does he apply the adjective in the sense of what the novel has become, that is, what Butor calls "une fiction mimant la vérité.", hence grounded in fact. There is no doubt that Butor himself firmly equates the *romanesque* with the fictional. The *éléments romanesques* to which he refers in the passage quoted above are the fictions which are interspersed throughout such works as *Mobile* or *Description de San Marco*. *Mobile*, he said to Pierre Daix, "... n'est pas un roman en ce sens que ce qui fait qu'un roman est un roman c'est qu'il y a une fiction, c'est que la fiction y joue un rôle très important." At the same time, he points out, "... il y a toute une petite foule romanesque, toute une poussière romanesque qui est distribuée à l'intérieur de *Mobile*", whose function it is to throw "les éléments réels" into relief, thus switching roles with *fact* in the "realist" novel, where fact serves to "accréditer la fiction". One is reminded of Pierre Vernier's "... fait qui est comme un clou fixant mon texte" which only comes into being "... parce qu'il apparaît comme un foyer au milieu de toute une zone de probabilités", (*Degres*, 117). Again, speaking to Daix about *Mobile*, Butor explains that:

> "...la fiction joue un rôle de contraste par rapport à la réalité, insiste sur le caractère réel de la réalité, et en même temps la fiction insiste sur le caractère fictif de ce qu'on entend d'habitude par la réalité. ... On ne peut voir la réalité que par l'imagination, que par l'intermédiaire de l'imagination. Dans ces livres-là, c'est très consciemment que le rassemblement d'éléments réels provoque, disons, une espèce de réaction chimique, provoque des étincelles de fiction, provoque une lumière qui va nous permettre de voir ce que nous ne voyions pas auparavant."[3]

It is perhaps in this interplay between fact and fiction that the strongest current of continuity between *Degrés* and the later books lies.

It is possible, of course, that by *romanesque*, Roudaut merely meant *novelistic*, in the sense of pertaining to the novel. But in that case, the distinction he makes is deprived of meaning, since to speak of *Romanesque I*, to denote the first four novels, is tautology, and to call the other four works in question *Romanesque 2* is, on Butor's own evidence, a misnomer.

The most one can say is that Butor's writing takes a new turn after *Degrés*. The terms *Romanesque I* and *2* may be a convenient way of indicating this but they are lacking in precision. Nonetheless, I accept Roudaut's classification in so far as this chapter will be devoted to the four words he consigns to Butor's second period. I do so because they have a great deal in common and because their relationship to each other is such that it seems more profitable to examine them together rather than separately, as I did for the first four novels.

On at least two occasions Butor has referred to his post-*Degrés* work as developing like a tree, rather than in a linear progression:

> "Auparavant, on pouvait dire que les livres se suivaient l'un l'autre, chaque livre engendrait le suivant, mais maintenant ça ne suffit pas. Mes livres se développent comme une espèce d'arbre si vous voulez."[4]

From what might have been called "une suite de romans", his work has developed into "une gerbe". By examining together the first four elements in that sheaf we can bring to light the complex relationships uniting them in an organic whole and thus obtain a perspective on the direction in which Butor's writing is tending. The fact that a chapter was devoted to each of the first four novels should not be taken as an indication that I accord more importance to them than to the later work. The arrangement is suggested by the manner in which Butor's *oeuvre* has developed. In reply to an inquiry from Robbe-Grillet as to why none of his recent work has borne the sub-title *roman*, Butor said that while "Les quatre romans se sont suivis comme des théorèmes, chacun étant la conséquence des problèmes qui avaient surgi dans la réalisation du précédent.", he continued to write poetry and essays. He was constrained to acknowledge, therefore, that he could not achieve his ambition to "tout faire passer par le roman" and to realise that he was in fact working in several genres at once. Confronted with the fact that his *oeuvre* was branching out like a tree he decided to "explorer les intervalles entre les branches, de réexaminer les genres littéraires dans leur ensemble."[5] Since *Degrés*, according to Butor himself, the books he has published have been either collections of essais or "des études, c'est-à-dire quelque chose qui est entre l'essai, le poème et le roman."[6] It would seem, therefore, that the books which succeed *Degrés* should be viewed rather as a logical development than a radical change of course. That they were regarded, for the most part, as the latter, may be an index of the failure of many critics and readers to understand the nature of Butor's venture.

Yet it would be dangerous to emphasise continuity to the point of eclipsing the novelty of works such as *Réseau Aerien* and *Mobile*, for they were startlingly new. It was this newness that provoked a hostile reaction. As Butor has remarked:

> "Chaque fois qu'il y a quelque chose de nouveau qui apparaît, on essaie de se protéger contre cette nouveauté et on oppose à cette nouveauté des classiques."[7]

Ironically, in his own case, it was his own earlier work, become classic, that was invoked as protection against the novelty of his later books. Other artists have had the same experience. "'Since you can draw so beautifully, why do you spend your time making those queer things?' some one asked Pablo Picasso. 'That's the reason,' he replied." James Joyce replied to a similar question that it would have been easy to produce two conventional books a year, but that it would not have been worth doing. According to Harry Levin:

> "The high standard of competent mediocrity that characterises the arts, in an epoch of museums and machines, makes it too easy to express oneself and too difficult to say anything new... The creative artist, Joyce, or Picasso, Eliot or Stravinsky, must be coldly and deliberately exceptional. He must not only surpass his predecessors; he must surpass himself. Hence those accelerated developments that compel him to go from climax to climax, bringing forth every few years a new style and another revelation."[8]

This is a variation on the theme of Butor's essay on "La

Critique et l'invention" (R 3, 7-20) in which he questions the utility of adding to the already enormous number of books available, if the addition is no more than a repetition of an established formula:

> "La formule du roman habituel est donc tout simplement une sorte de parodie. La plupart des écrivains, le sachant ou non, prennent des livres célèbres d'autrefois et maquillent leurs rides. Combinant un schéma bien connu, dont notre éducation nous a donné l'habitude, et des signes extérieurs de modernité, leurs ouvrages peuvent bénéficier d'une diffusion rapide et atteignent parfois de grands tirages." (R 3, 9).

In Butor's eyes this is more than needless repetition; it is pernicious, because it prevents us from becoming aware of how the world has changed and impedes any further change from taking place. On the other hand:

> "Chaque fois qu'il y a oeuvre originale, invention, si gratuite qu'il puisse nous sembler au premier abord, il y a peu à peu nécessité pour nous d'aménager à partir d'elle le monde dont nous faisons partie." (R 3, 20).

There could be no more fitting rubric under which to begin a study of the works of Butor's second period. I have referred in an earlier chapter to Butor's declared ambition to *devenir contemporain*. Richard Ellmann's definitive study on Joyce begins with this sentence: "We are still learning to be Joyce's contemporaries, to understand our interpreter."[9] We could say the same about

Butor. If we have managed to make ourselves contemporaries of his first four novels, the last of which appeared in 1960, we have perhaps not yet closed the gap separating us from the books that followed. But this should not perturb us unduly. As is so often the case, Butor himself has experienced and articulated the difficulty:

> "La première fois que je lis un livre ou que je le parcours, très souvent, je ne l'ai pas compris... C'est seulement quelques mois ou quelques années plus tard, cette première lecture ayant fait son travail, et puis surtout ce livre ayant fait son chemin dans la societé autour de moi, que je deviens enfin capable de parler de ce livre."[10]

But if we perhaps feel more diffident in our approach to Butor's later works we should be neither scandalised nor intimidated by them. Before these *oeuvres ouvertes* our critical attitude should also be open, resting on our faith in the writer's proven integrity. We should be willing to learn to "understand our interpreter" and alert enough at the same time to be aware of any instances where he may have misinterpreted us and the world.

> "L'oeuvre neuve est un germe qui croît dans le terrain de la lecture; la critique est comme sa floraison.
>
> Ici et là immenses arbres poussant à chaque saison tant de nouvelles branches sur le tissu des bois." (R 3, 17).

When *Mobile* came out in 1962, however, it must have seemed, initially at least, that the seed had fallen on stony ground.

The first four novels have made their way; we have adjusted our vision of the world accordingly, and we are now able to speak of them. The later works are slowly undergoing the same process. In studying them, it is necessary to preserve a nice balance between novelty and continuity, remembering Butor's firm belief in the *pouvoir rétroactif* of the former and applying this principle to his own work. If at first his assertion that, for him, all his work is in direct continuity with *Degrés*, particularly, seems surprising, perhaps it is that his earlier work had not been fully understood. A re-examination of *Romanesque 1* may illuminate *Romanesque 2* and vice versa. In any case, it would be wrong to regard Butor's new departure as a repudiation of what had gone before. Asked to evaluate in terms of their importance to him, *Mobile* or *6,810,000 Litres d'eau par seconde* in comparison with *Le Génie du Lieu* or *La Modification*, he said definitely, "... je n'accorde pas plus d'importance aux uns qu'aux autres."[11]

In fact, the year 1962 saw the publication of two books by Butor, *Mobile* and *Réseau Aérien*.[13] Although they resemble each other from several points of view, the former caused a major scandal, the latter did not. It is instructive to examine the reasons for this difference in critical reception.

Mobile, étude pour une représentation des Etats Unis, Butor's book on America, startled, in the first instance, by its format. Printed on unusually large pages, the text is disposed in what appears to be a highly idiosyncratic manner. Use is made of five different margins and several type-faces, some pages are thickly covered with print, others are what Butor calls *aéré*. *Réseau Aérien, texte radiophonique* is orthodox in size. Broadly speaking, it is a description of a circuit of the globe by aeroplane, or more accurately, by aeroplanes, since no one of them completes the circuit. Two type faces and four margins are employed, in addition to three symbols which denote the noise of a plane, the noise of a crowd and *une percussion sourde* respectively, and which appear singly, together and accompanied by one the numerals from 1 to ten, there being a total of ten aeroplanes involved. Although Butor has pointed out that *Mobile* should not be regarded as a sort of itinerary through the United States,[14] it would nevertheless be permissible to say, in the context of this discussion, that its general movement, like that of *Réseau Aérien*, though obviously to a lesser degree, is that of a *survol*. In addition, there is a parallel between the network of dialogues which extends from plane to plane with that "espèce de monologue qui est en pointillé, qui traverse le livre," which Butor has drawn attention to in *Mobile*, and which, he stresses, does not issue from just one individual:

> "... c'est un monologue qui passe perpétuellement d'une tête à une autre, c'est un monologue qui est complètement détaché de l'individu même c'est un discours qui va d'un homme à un autre homme;" [15]

Leon Roudiez has written of *Réseau Aérien* that "The total impression is one of a choral song of mankind in which unidentified individuals blend their commom preoccupations about different things and countries into elemental melodies of love and hate".[16]

Given these similarities between the two works, why did *Mobile* shock to such a disproportionately greater extent than *Réseau Aérien*, which it virtually eclipsed?

It has been suggested that *Réseau Aérien* was largely ignored by critics because it is a less important work than *Mobile* and because it is shorter and less demanding.[17] This opinion may be correct, but it is open to qualification, at least, if not challenge. On the other hand, indignation is a self-limiting emotion, and it would have been difficult, after the furore aroused by *Mobile*, to achieve comparably violent paroxysms so soon. But the real answer to my question lies, I think, in the fact that *Réseau Aérien* was presented as a *texte radiophonique*. It was not regarded therefore, primarily as a *book*, properly speaking. It did not threaten the very strictly limited concept of a book which is held by most people when they are thinking about literature and about the novel in particular. The typographical idiosyncrasies of *Réseau Aérien*, though they are many, did not seem to represent a challenge to the linear discourse that novel-readers had come to expect. The work was a transcript, so it appeared, of a text intended to be realised in another medium: radio.

This tells us a great deal about the reasons for the indignation aroused by *Mobile*. Destined primarily to be read rather than heard or acted, it represented a challenge to what Roland Barthes has called *l'idée consacrée du Livre*, which *Réseau Aérien* did not. Neither do catalogues, dictionaries, instruction manuals of all sorts nor text-books, all of which are typographically idiosyncratic. Neither does poetry. No one, perhaps, values the Book more highly than Butor, but unlike most of us, his *idée consacrée du Livre* does not reduce it to one of its manifestations. Rather, it seeks to embrace all of them in order to make us aware of the limitations of our own vision and our reluctance to use the resources of printing to the full, for anything other than practical or explicative purposes. As Barthes points out:

> "... *le Livre-Objet se confond matériellement avec le Livre-Idée* ... En sorte qu'attenter à la régularite matérielle de l'oeuvre, c'est viser l'idée même de littérature."[18]

Mobile shocked primarily on account of its typographical strangeness, a characteristic which it shares with the other works classified by Roudaut as *Romanesque 2*. It now becomes evident why neither *Histoire Extraordinaire* nor *Illustrations* appear in this category. The first, though far from an orthodox *essai*, observed the typographical conventions of the genre, in the main. (Butor explicitly refused the conventions of the scholarly apparatus, however. There are no footnotes.) The second, although its layout is highly unconventional, qualifies as poetry. Does this mean that the concept of *Romanesque 2* can be reduced to mere juggling with the physical aspect of the book? Only, it seems to me, if we allow the resulting strangeness to blind us to the new horizons which Butor is trying to reveal. As always, *technique* in his work is expressive of a *métaphysique*. If the latter is not immediately penetrable, then we should be prepared to examine the former seriously, acknowledging its necessity until the contrary is proven.

Speaking about his stay in America, Butor said:

> "Je pensais qu'à mon retour, je pourrais écrire un ou deux textes un peu du même genre que ce que j'avais fait dans le premier *Génie du Lieu*... Mais plus mon séjour s'est prolongé, plus je me suis rendu compte que les outils qui fonctionnaient très bien pour les villes de la Méditerranée ne me permettaient pas de parler avec justesse des Etats-Unis. C'est pourquoi j'ai élaboré peu à peu les instruments grammaticaux, au sens général du terme grammaire, d'un livre comme *Mobile*;"[19]

The format of *Mobile*, then, is not gratuitous. It is dictated by Butor's perception of the United States and represents part of the solution to the problem of making that country, as he perceived it, present to the reader. It is grammatically necessary, as he says; a notion which is clarified in "Recherches sur la technique du roman". Having discussed time, place and the use of personal pronouns in the novel, he goes on to say:

> "Liaisons des temps, des lieux et des personnes, nous sommes en pleine grammaire. Il faudra appeler à son secours toutes les ressources de la langue. La petite phrase que nous recommandaient nos professeurs d'antan, 'légère et courte vêtue' ne suffira plus. Dès que l'on sortira des sentiers battus, il faudra préciser quelle est la 'conjoncion' entre deux propositions qui se suivent. On ne pourra plus la laisser sous-entendue." (R 2, 98).

Few countries could rival America in the sweep and complexity of its "liaisons de temps, des lieux et des personnes." What conjunctions are possible between the statements one could make about this New World, what conjunctions connect it with the old, link together the man-made States of the Union? Among those proposed by Butor are the homonyms among place names which are found in state after state, often echoing the names of European cities ("Manchester, cf. de Clay, Etat de Bourbon.", "MANCHESTER, Washtenaw.","MANCHESTER, comté de Kennebec, MAINE.", "MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE.", "MANCHESTER, VERMONT.", "MANCHESTER, NEW YORK."), the catalogues of the giant mail order companies of Sears and Montgomery Ward and the four time zones which testify to the vastness of the country. Linked thus, short sentences group together to form long ones and consequently:

> "Quand ces ensembles verbaux deviendront par trop considérables, ils se diviseront tout naturellement en paragraphes, se charpenteront de répétitions, joueront de tous les contrastes de couleurs que permettent les différents 'styles', par citations ou parodies, isoleront leurs parties énumeratives par une disposition typographique appropriée.
>
> Ainsi le chercheur perfectionne nos outils." (R 2, 98).

Mobile is an *articulation* of the United States and enables us to be articulate about them.

Yet according to one critic: "C'est un ouvrage absolument illisible," besides which, "On ne trouvera dans ce gros livre, en dehors des citations, ni une phrase ni une pensée qui méritent un instant d'attention." One wonders if it is possible that the work could have fallen so far short of the writer's intention, especially when the writer concerned is as skilled and as thoughtful as Butor, and of course it is possible, but not probable. In any case, the reader of good will must decide for himself, by direct confrontation with *Mobile*, and bearing in mind his remarks about grammar, the motto adopted by Butor for his work on Montaigne: "Attachons-nous à la liaison." seems equally appropriate to this task. The basic principle of liaison in *Mobile* is one which characterises a curious aspect of the liaison between the states themselves, their repertory of place-names; a typically Butorian procedure which is heralded in the title: *Mobile*, as in Alabama.

"I have fallen in love with American names,
The sharp gaunt names that never get fat,
The snakeskin-titles of mining claims,
The plumed war-bonnet of Medicine Hat,
Tucson and Deadwood and Lost Mule Flat."

Stephen Vincent Benet

There is no narrator in *Mobile*, no central character proferring his opinions on the United States, providing causal or sentimental links between different parts of the country. As Butor says, "Il y a quarante-huit heures qui passe sur les Etats-Unis."[20] As light succeeds dark in one state after the other, certain aspects of the country are revealed. Butor is outside the work, "paring his finger-nails". The conjunctions which hold the work together are the alphabetical order of the fifty states of the Union and the homonyms in state after state. These links are re-inforced by the typography and it is in this way that Butor's *Etats* are *Unis*.[21] The contact the reader of *Mobile* makes with America is as direct as possible.[22] As Jean Roudaut remarks, the books in *Romanesque 2* are "... transparents comme une feuille réduite à ses nervures."[23] *Mobile* exposes what Mary McCarthy has called America's "parade of phenomenology" in such a manner as to corroborate the various *idées reçues* commonly held about the United States. It might even be said of it, that the medium is the message.

Broadly speaking, there are two possible approaches to *Mobile*. One can examine it in its literary and physical aspect as a *book*, or, on the other hand, one can interrogate it as the *étude pour une représentation des Etats Unis* which it purports to be. Not surprisingly, perhaps, American critics have expressed more interest in the latter dimension of the work than their French counterparts, who have commented sparingly on the fidelity of the image rendered by "L'Amérique en Butorama" when they have done so at all.[24] The question then immediately arises: "Fidelity to what?" Setting aside the issue of "realism", one could consider what image is generally held of the United States by (a) Europeans, and (b) Americans and then try to establish how far Butor's America coincides with one or both of these. Does *Mobile* effectively *represent* the United States? In the light of current trends in art and criticism, that question may appear to be rather old-fashioned, all the same, the subtitle of *Mobile* invites it.

Reading the book now, eleven years after publication, the first thing to be noted is its failure to shock. Irritate, perhaps, shock, no. The format has lost the advantage of surprise and the picture of America which emerges turns out to be an agglomerate of clichés, viz. the Deep South is racist, the dispossession and genocide of the Indians is an unexpiated crime, America is a Big Country, it is a nation of consumers. So it is perhaps not surprising that one English critic has remarked that Butor's:

> "principles of selection are curiously old-fashioned. To the banalities of the American scene he adds the banalities of the conventional European comment upon the United States."[25]

"Precisely", Butor would have said, had he read this last pronouncement which coincides almost exactly with certain remarks he himself made to the Italian critic, Paolo Caruso, about *Mobile*. While it incorporates a certain number of his direct impressions of America, he says, these are relatively few in comparison with the knowledge of the country he had acquired *before* going there, including pre-conceptions and commonplaces. Naturally, there are true and false commonplaces circulating about America, Butor continues, and the problem for him, he says somewhat cryptically, was to examine them in such a light as to make all of them come true. If, therefore, we no longer react with shocked surprise to *Mobile*, it is not only because the book has made its way in society, to paraphrase Butor, but also because of the preponderance of *lieux communs*, deliberately contrived, in the image of America which it presents.

This has very important consequences for the *form* of *Mobile* as well as for its content, and it would perhaps be appropriate here to discuss briefly the form/content dichotomy which, as Susan Sontag has pointed out, continues to bedevil criticism. I have been guilty of it myself, but in this instance consciously, and with a purpose. To speak about *Mobile* as a book, on the one hand, and as a representation of the United States on the other, is to divide it into form and content. But this runs counter to Butor's aesthetics, which might be summarised in Archibald MacLeish's, "A poem should not mean, but be", and he regards *Mobile* as being closer to poetry than to any other genre, in terms of his own definition of poetry as the manipulation of *des formes suffisamment fortes*. (He has said of it that: "Je n'ai jamais écrit de livre dont l'ordre ait été plus soigné.") *Mobile* is in fact effectively impossible to summarise, and this is equally true of the works which follow. This is a consequence of the absence of any linear discourse and it imposes on the reader who wants to know what *Mobile* is about, the obligation to read the book, which means, in effect, that form and content are inseparable. This is admirably illustrated by the fact that not only is *Mobile* constructed largely of *lieux communs* but also that one of its basic principles of *liaison* is the *lieu commun* in the literal sense; the astonishing network of homonymic place names which extends all over the United States and proclaims its connections with the old world.

Robert Kanters' comment was, in a curious way, very near the mark, in the sense that Butor's contribution to the number of words making up *Mobile* is relatively very small. The book is almost entirely composed of quotations; not only the excerpts from Franklin and Jefferson and the account of the witch trials at Salem, but also the extracts from the mail order catalogues, from the *blurb* about books such as Emily Post's *Etiquette*, or the Van de Velde marriage manual, John James Audobon's portraits of the birds of America, speed limits, road signs and the names of states, counties, towns, cities and national monuments. It would be true to say that the original contributions made by Butor to *Mobile* could be reduced to the *monologue en pointillé* to which I have already referred. But of course the real originality of the book lies in the order of its presentation, in its *forme forte* and in the *liaison*. The interplay of quotations so that "tout mord, menace", which was a feature of *Degrés*, is here greatly magnified.

This discussion opened with the observation that there are two possible approaches to *Mobile*. This remains true in so far as long-established attitudes make it almost impossible for the critic not to divorce form and content, despite frequent assertions to the contrary. The academic convention of summarising a book as a prelude to critical assessment, observed in the preceding chapters of this study, bears ample testimony to this. Although *Mobile* cannot be summarised satisfactorily, form and content can still be separated. But it gradually becomes evident that it does not really matter whether one approaches *Mobile* as a book or as a representation of the United States, because it comes to the same thing in the end. Whichever angle one pursues, it will inevitably lead to, and merge with the other. This forestalling of the divisive impulse of the reader is one of the major achievements of the book. That the earlier novels did not do so is perhaps evidence that the *forme* was not *suffisamment forte* to counteract the urge toward the form/content dichotomy. In this regard, some remarks of Butor's to F. C. St. Aubyn are instructive:

> "Evidemment, vous dites 'le message de *Mobile* ne se trouve pas dans ce que vous dites, mais provient de juxtapositions inattendues.' Ça, *c'est exactement la même chose que la signification d'un roman.* La signification d'un roman, c'est ce que font les personnages, etc. De même, la signification de *Mobile*, naturellement, c'est l'espace dans lequel je me suis efforcé de mettre différents éléments."
> (my italics)

One of the dominant *lieux communs* supporting *Mobile* is the racism and segregation of Blacks, in the Deep South particularly. The first page of *Mobile* reads as follows:

> nuit noire à
> CORDOUE, ALABAMA, le profond Sud,[26]

The ideas of blackness, the Deep South, the segregation issue

(Alabama was, of course, Martin Luther King country), the Moors of Cordoba are all evoked in these few words. Yet it is also a bald statement of fact. It is dark night; there is a town called Cordova in the state of Alabama, which is in the Deep South. The physical reality of the United States is presented "as is", so to speak, and yet in such a manner as to be heavy with implication. Typographically, the incongruity between the two place names is brought out by their juxtaposition and by the fact that they are printed in higher case. The words *nuit noire* are centred above Alabama, however, because of the strong associations which would have been alive in the mind of the reader in 1960. To have written simply, "nuit noire à Cordoue, Alabama, le profond Sud", would not have had the same impact; *noire* would then have been associated with *Cordoue*. This would also have effected the impact of the Spanish name, in its French version; would perhaps have masked the latent nostalgia for Europe in this homonym of a European city. As it is, the eye tends to proceed thus: "nuir noire à Alabama, le profond sud" and only then takes in *Cordoue*, the incongruity of which, as a place-name in Alabama, is thus made to stand out. The word-order: "nuit noire à Alabama, le profond sud" could also conceivably be Mallarméean syntax for "le profond sud nuit [à une/la] noire á Alabama." This in turn would suggest a plausible reason for the choice of the French form, *Cordoue*, for by developing the pun in the Rousselian manner, one would get: "le profond sud, Alabama, nuit [à une] noire à corps doux," which would be a pointed statement on racism.

It is possible too, that the first place-name, and indeed the first word in *Mobile*, is given in French in order to underline the fact that the book represents America seen through French eyes. It also establishes a link with the first piece in Butor's first *Génie du lieu*, called simply *Cordoue*.

In the course of his essay on Cordova, Butor quotes and provides a translation of Gongora's sonnet *A Cordoba*, which contains the lines:

> "Oh gran rio, gran rey de Andalucia,
> de arenas nobles, ya que non doradas!"

In Butor's version:

> "O grand fleuve, grand roi d'Andalousie,
> aux sables nobles bien que non dorés!"
> (*Le Génie du lieu*, 15)

The Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, bastard son of one of the Spanish conquerors and a princess of Cuzco, is buried in Cordova, and Butor suggests that his *Commentaires Royaux*, an account of his youth in the New World, would have been known to Gongora. Hence, in Butor's view, the line quoted above referring to the Guadalquivir "aux sables nobles bien que non dorés!" must be understood as a reference to

"L'Eldorado, aux fabuleux fleuves de l'Amérique roulant, selon la rumeur publique, d'énormes pépites," (*Le Génie du lieu*, 27). Three pages after the opening *Cordoue* of Mobile, we come upon *EL DORADO*.

Finally, it should be noted that although the states are evoked in alphabetical order in *Mobile*, the first place-name in the book, aside from the title, of course, begins with the letter *C*. Towns beginning with the letter *A* abound in Alabama (Anniston, Aliceville, Auburn, Alexander City, Attalla, Atmore, even *Andalusia*) so one must conclude that Butor deliberately rejected them. In addition to the reasons already advanced for his choice of *Cordoue* to open the work, it may be that its beginning with the third letter of the alphabet was a further recommendation in Butor's eyes. This is suggested by the fact that the last two cities to be mentioned are ALBANY and BUFFALO. ALBANY, BUFFALO, CORDOUE, the series ABC links the end of the book with the beginning, just as the last word in *Finnegans Wake* points backwards to the first.

"Quand j'ai écrit *Mobile*", Butor has said, "si j'avais à ma disposition une calculatrice électronique avec des gens capables de me montrer comment lui donner de la pâture, cela m'aurait épargné beaucoup de travail."[27] This utterance validates the necessarily brief exercise in *How to Read Mobile* just completed. It would also seem to justify the accusations of *fetticizzazione tecnicista* levelled at Butor and referred to in the last chapter. The reaction of many readers might be expressed in words he himself has written about Roussel, whose procedures bear some resemblance to his own:

> "Quoi, dira-t-on, tout ce prodigieux rève n'est donc que le résultat d'une ingénieuse mécanique tournant à vide?" (R 1, 173).

But Roussel's method, like Butor's in *Mobile*, is essentially poetic,"... il s'agit en effet du procédé de la rime extraordinairement développé, et comme éclaté." (R 1, 173). It reposes, to a large extent, on the *homonym*, and as Butor points out:

> "Ce qui apparaît dès lors comme fondamentale dans cette pratique, c'est l'attention accordée aux mots eux-mêmes, et cette volonté d'exploration méthodique de leur emploi; 'Toujours les prendre dans un sens autre que celui qui se présentait tout d'abord!" (Ibid.)

Persons for whom the primary use of literature is to be a "human document" are frequently put off by statements of this sort, which seem to advocate a certain cerebral sterility. Perhaps their dismay is rooted in a misapprehension about the nature of literature, which is, after all, "words, words, words". Butor has frequently insisted on this fact, so often ignored, particularly by novel-readers.

> "Un personnage de roman n'est pas un personnage en soi, ce n'est pas un personnage 'réel'; c'est

> un ensemble de mots, c'est une construction de mots par l'intermédiare de laquelle nous pourrons connaître les personnages réels, c'est un mot très complexe." (Entretiens, 28).[28]

It is because many readers lost sight of this fact that verbal experiments such as those conducted by Roussel or Butor or Joyce shock by their lack of "humanity". (Even Harriet Weaver and Ezra Pound rejected *Finnegans Wake*.)

Perhaps that is not so surprising, after all, if we accept Harry Levin's verdict, according to which, Joyce in his last work, elected:

> "... to forego the normal suspenses and sympathies that bind the reader to the book, reduce the plot to a few platitudes that can be readily stylised, and confer complete autonomy on words. They are now matter, not manner. Nothing could be further from the fallacy of imitative form than Joyce's latter tendency towards abstract content. We are borne from one page to the next, not by the expository current of the prose, but by the harmonic relations of the language - phonetic, syntactic, or referential, as the case may be. The mythological themes, recurring, varying, modulating into a new context, have a consistency of their own. When we have an index to them, we shall comprehend the book."[29]

Almost every word of this penetrating criticism could be applied to *Mobile*, in which Butor's treatment of language differs only from Joyce's (and Roussel's) in that there is no deliberate distortion of words. Speaking of the influence exerted by *Finnegans Wake* on *Mobile*, Butor stresses this point, saying that he uses an existing vocabulary, as opposed to Joyce's neologisms. However, he goes on:

> "... la somiglianza sta nel fatto che questi vocaboli sono presi in accezioni de senso sempre nuove, e cioè con continui mutamenti di significato lungo tutto il libro, che risulta cosi interamente costruito in base a omonimi."[30]

He gives as examples the names of cities such as Cordova and Florence which designate not only the European "originals" but a multitude of cities all over the United States. He is careful to point out that he is not responsible for these changes in signification. They are typical of the United States and he merely *registers* them. But in addition to this first kind of homonym, there are others which assume the character of key-words and which designate now men, now mountains, now cities, now rivers and so on. Examples of such names are "Washington" or "Lincoln". He concludes:

> "Talvolta i nomi sono già in partenza diversi dal senso abituale, tal'altra no, ma sempre mutano senso durante il libro, che è un po' la storia del mutamento di senso di queste parole."[31]

Mobile presents itself as a system of words but this does not mean that it is divorced from "reality". Rather the reverse, at least from the phenomenological viewpoint, which R.-M. Albérès has resumed thus:

> "Dans cette méthodologie nouvelle, il ne convient pas de dire que le langage est un instrument qui *exprime* une société, un individu, ou un univers. Car dans la vision du monde qu'elle sous-entend, une société ou un homme ne *sont* qu'un langage (comme l'Univers pour les physiciens, n'est pas une 'réalité' mais un ensemble de formules).[32]

America is structured by language and by exploring this language the country itself is revealed. The mutations of meaning to which the key-words relating to the United States are subject *is* in a sense the United States. It was this reality that Butor sought to express, hence the quotations that he uses are all from American sources. His objective, he says, was to attain "la cosa stessa" and then "di farla parlare": the thing itself, in this case, being what America really is for him. A book in the *impressions de voyage* mode would, he believes, have been entirely false to this conception. By eschewing the connective tissue of linear discourse and adopting the topology of America as a *forme* at once *forte* and marvellously flexible, Butor has succeeded, in Jean Roudaut's words, in constructing "... des grilles de décryptement de la réalité.", "... par opposition au livre qui raconte le réel perceptible et finit par empêcher de voir ce réel, par dresser un mur d'images entre le lecteur et la réalité qu'on voulait lui donner à voir,".[33]

It seems to me that the notion of topology (in all of its senses) is of great importance to the understanding of

Mobile. Its primary sense of "connaissance des lieux" establishes an obvious link, but its mathematical connotation: "...branche de la géometrie qui étudie les propriétés des êtres géometriques subsistant après une déformation continue, mais d'ailleurs quelconque" (Larousse) is equally relevant. Jean Roudaut has remarked on the element of distortion in Butor's later work:

> "Le sens des derniers livres de Butor n'est point non plus en ce qu'ils disent (résumable en citations habilement choisies) mais dans la modification que subit au cours de la rédaction un projet formel initial, et le livre se confond avec une distorsion; l'examen du début et de la fin du livre ne suffit pas a en rendre compte."[34]

Recalling Butor's statement to Caruso about his treatment of *luoghi comuni* in *Mobile* and his avowedly malicious quotation of Jefferson and Franklin, we could say that *Mobile* is a conscious deformation of the United States. This has the paradoxical consequence of giving him immunity from such criticisms as are typified by Mary McCarthy's essay "Mlle Gulliver en Amérique",[35] in which she condemns another French visitor, Simone de Beauvoir, for making America conform to her own preconceptions of it. On the other hand, by making the topology of America, in the primary sense, the basis of his book, Butor seems to have discovered a means of locating the *genius loci* of the country, a task the difficulty of which McCarthy has wittily and convincingly demonstrated in another essay "America the Beautiful *The Humanist in the Bathtub.*" Finding herself stumped by the request of a visiting existentialist to be brought to dinner at a "really American place", she writes:

> "We heard ourselves saying that the real America was elsewhere, in the white frame houses and church spires of New England; yet we knew that we talked foolishly ... The Elevated, half a block away, interrupting us every time a train passed, gave us the lie on schedule, every eight minutes. But if the elm-shaded village green was a false or at least an insufficient address for the *genius loci* we honored, where then was it to be found?"[36]

Not, she argues, in its institutions, nor in certain objects of beauty, which, when not created by nature belong for the most part to the eighteenth century, to a past with which the average American has no connection and in which his ancestors had no part. "The American," she concludes, "if he is to speak the highest truth about his country, must refrain from pointing at all. The virtue of American civilisation is that it is unmaterialistic."

Many, perhaps, would find the last sentence contestable. Considerations of space prevent the inclusion of the arguments McCarthy advances in its support. The point I wish to make is that Butor, in *Mobile*, seems to have succeeded in creating the illusion of not doing so. The topology of the United States, ordered by the alphabet (the most neutral of classifications) and existing homonyms, dictates the progress of the book and the direction of the beholder's gaze.

McCarthy concludes her essay by firmly laying the blame for the inadequacies of American civilisation at the door of Europe "the unfinished negative of which America is the proof." She asks:

> "The ugliness of American decoration, American entertainment, American literature - is not this the visible expression of the impoverishment of the European masses, a manifestation of all the backwardnesses, deprivation and want that arrived here in boatloads from Europe? ...
>
> Given a clean slate, man, it was hoped, would write the future. Instead, he has written his past. The past, inscribed on billboards, ball parks, dance halls, is not seemly, yet its objectification is a kind of disburdenment. The past is at length outside."

Here is that same *nostalgie de l'Europe* of which Butor provides concrete demonstration in the place-names of America: Cordoue, Florence, Manchester etc. The culpability of Europe is acknowledged by the recurring references to *Les Européens* who, "*... venaient chassés de l'Europe richissime par la misère, par la tyrannie de l'argent...*" (P. 91).

> *"Et la nouvelle Europe se comportant exactement comme l'ancienne, ils l'ont fuie, chassés par un vent de haine, d'intolérance, de misère et de tyrannie, avec l'espoir ferme d'y revenir en faisant sonner leurs dollars..."* (P. 101).

In their flight, they drove the native Indians before them:

> *"Chassés, ils ont traversé l'Indiana et*
> *l'Illinois pour entrer dans l'Iowa,*
> *chassant devant eux les Indiens;"*

Butor, like McCarthy, finishes on a note of restrained optimism:

> "Comme nous t'attendons, Amérique,!
> ...
> Comme nous attendons ton retournement!"

In McCarthy's version:

> "If there were time, American civilisation could be seen as a beginning, even a favourable one, for we have only to look around us to see what a lot of sensibility a little ease will accrue."[37]

Mobile, then, is not only a highly-structured system of words, a clever intellectual exercise. It is also an evocation of the *genius loci* of the United States. The manner in which it combines these two functions constitutes one of its major achievements. Thus, Roudiez's comment that: "La *représentation* des Etats-Unis amorcée dans *Mobile* n'est donc pas une mimésis: c'est essentiellement un spectacle monté à partir des mots et jouant sur les mythes."[38], seems too limiting. *Mobile* is not simply either of these things but a wonderfully subtle combination of both. A comparison of the book with the first *Génie du lieu* would yield interesting results, but comment here must be limited to pointing out that Butor has insisted that those earlier pieces were not "... non plus des souvenirs de voyages mais des textes de critique...", and, he went on:

> "Oui on fait bien de la critique littéraire à partir d'une oeuvre et de son auteur. Pourquoi n'en ferait-on pas autant à partir d'un lieu pris comme objet? Seules les méthodes d'approche seront différentes, puisque l'on ne peut pas se référer à une biographie personnelle; mais il y a l'histoire, l'évolution d'un peuple, dont les villes, ces oeuvres collectives, portent les empreintes."[39]

Although the United States required him to elaborate an entirely new grammar in his pursuit of its *génie du lieu*, *Mobile* is also "un texte de critique", in addition to its poetic and novelistic facets. It is *une étude*, in other words, in Butor's definition of the term; "... quelque chose qui est entre l'essai, le poème et le roman." The interaction between the three genres yields a new perspective on each of them. An examination of the role of the novel in this tri-partite process may serve to illustrate how this is accomplished.

"'In matters of style I really no longer admit anything but parody. In this close to Joyce...'"

Thomas Mann

"T. S. Eliot's question 'whether the novel had not outlived its function since Flaubert and James, and whether *Ulysses* should not be considered an epic' paralleled my own question whether in the field of the novel nowadays the only thing that counted was what was no longer a novel."

Thomas Mann

Although neither *Mobile* nor any of Butor's works since 1960 are novels, yet a certain link with the novel is maintained, not only in the *poussière romanesque* whose atoms are suspended here and there throughout the book but in the work as a whole. *Mobile* is crammed with characters of all sorts. First of all there is the American crowd (...une foule de trois couleurs, rouge, noire et blanche) and then a number of principal characters, who are also historical, such as Jefferson, Franklin, William Penn etc. These last are invariably made to speak in their own words. Butor has explained that he treated these quotations in *Mobile* exactly as if they were *words*, proceeding in the same manner as the novelist does with "... les mots de la vie de tous les jours", when he arranges them in sentences "... qui leur font dire quelque chose d'autre, quelque chose qu'on ne disait pas auparavant." Both this use of quotation and the novels in embryo which emerge in the dreams of "l'uomo americano" interspresed throughout *Mobile*, have in them a strong element of parody.

"La parodie est l'une des dimensions fondamentalesde l'art contemporain.",[40] Butor believes, but not necessarily in its humorous or sarcastic connotation. "La parodie n'est pas forcément sarcastique mais l'emploi des citations est très important aujourd'hui. Pas seulement aujourd'hui. Songez aux parodies de Bach par lui-même." It would seem as if the terms *citation* and *parodie* are so strongly linked in Butor's canon as to be interchangeable. He has, for instance, said, in the course of another interview, that: "... la citation est, pour moi, un procédé fondamental de l'art moderne."[41] He even goes so far as to declare that there can be no truly modern art without quotation:

> "... parce qu'il y a 'art moderne' lorsque l'on sait que l'on se trouve à l'intérieur d'une histoire de l'art c'est-à-dire lorsque l'on sait qu'il y a déjà eu beaucoup de livres, beaucoup de peinture, beaucoup de musique, voire même que nous sommes encombrés de littérature, de peinture, de musique".[42]

One supposes that it was just such an opinion that inspired Mann's remark about parody and perhaps also his question as to whether the only thing that counted in the field of the novel nowadays was what was no longer a novel.[43]

In his essay on Joyce, Butor points out that "On peut considérer la parodie comme une extension du calembour" and indicates that the result of the parodies in *Ulysses* is that "Nous avons un texte à deux foyers de signification, l'un illusoire, l'autre solide." (R 1, 224). It would seem, therefore, that despite Butor's disclaimer, a certain irony at least, is inherent in conscious parody and this is certainly present in *Mobile*. By his malicious quotation from their own writings, Butor, in effect, causes the illustrious figures to parody themselves. As to the *poussière romanesque*, which the disoriented reader is likely to seize on eagerly, it is a parody of the novel and the various "novelistic" situations with which we have become familiar. The fact that we grasp at such straws points up another observation of Mann's, to the effect that "... a link with tradition, no matter how parodistic that link is, makes for easier accessibility,".[44] In any case, it seems that the dreams which haunt Americans from state to state confirm various *idées reçues* about American society: the desire for wealth, to "make good", the emphasis on virility, the fearful curiosity and guilty desire provoked by the sexuality of the Blacks. Could it be that *Mobile* is a parody of the United States?

But the presence of fictions, in the form of a *poussière romanesque* fulfills another purpose in *Mobile*, a purpose closely related to the question of ease of access. Butor explains it to Caruso in the following terms:

> "Così in questa congerie de materiali,
> mi sono stato necessarie talune 'fissioni',
> magari minuscole, che contribuissero a dare un
> senso alla realtà americana da me presentata."[45]

This corroborates my earlier discussion of the reversal of the usual relationship between fact and fiction which takes place in *Mobile*, so that fiction validates fact and not vice versa. However, it also recalls a statement made by Butor concerning the first *Génie du lieu*, to the effect that:

> "On ne renonce d'ailleurs pas tout à fait à l'anecdote, puisqu'il faut bien situer l'observateur par rapport à l'objet observé, - à ces villes ou ces pays; puisque l'important est de bien montrer ces divers lieux sous tous les angles de vue possibles et que les angles de vue dépendent évidemment de la position de l'observateur lui-même. Celui-ci ne peut donc disparaître."[46]

These words would seem to reinforce the link between *Le Génie du lieu* and *Mobile*. The reference to *tout les angles de vue possibles* is significant, since the quotation dates from 1958, two years before *Mobile*. On the other hand, they pose certain problems. For instance, does the connection they posit between the anecdote and the observer and the assertion that the latter cannot disappear, conflict with my earlier statement that "There is no narrator in *Mobile*"? If it does not, the implication would seem to be either that Butor has changed his mind about the need for an observer, or he has developed technical means to achieve the same effect without him, or at least while reducing his presence to a minimum. I am inclined to favour this point of view, but before discussing it further it will be necessary to qualify somewhat the assertion that "There is no narrator in *Mobile*".

It is not absolutely true because, in the first place, there are a number of narrators in the book, e.g. Jefferson, Franklin, the writers of the brochures for Freedomland and the extraordinary Clifton's Cafeteria.[47] However, these might all be classed as narrators of the second degree, rather like Henry James's "reflectors". A more serious challenge to the absence-of-narrator-theory is presented by the fact that Butor himself does appear, albeit very rarely, as observer in the text. These appearances are implicit in remarks such as the frequently quoted"Ce 'Mobile' est composé un peu comme un 'quilt'." (P. 29), and the ironic parenthesis denying the resemblance of Indian Reserves to concentration camps,[48] and explicit where the pronoun *Je* is used, as in "L'avion dans laquelle je voyageais vers San Francisco...", "Je volais en 'jet' de San Francisco à Chicago;", "'Notes sur l'Etat de Virginie, ... d'où j'extrais le passage suivant:", or "Quelqu'un, appartenant au département de français de l'Université de Californie à Los Angeles, me demanda si je préferais voir quelque chose de beau ou quelque chose de laid. 'Laid, bien sur! - Je vais nous ammener à Clifton's Cafeteria...'" This list includes the majority of Butor's interventions in *Mobile*, so it is evident that these are not many. It is clear too how they serve to situate the observer in relation to what is observed and their presence indicates that in effect, Butor has not found it possible, or desirable, perhaps, to eliminate the observer entirely. On the other hand, his appearances are of such rarity in relation to the size of the book that it is questionable if they obtrude at all on the reader's consciousness, so that I think one is justified, after all, in saying that there is no narrator in *Mobile*. It is the movement of the text, generated by the alphabetical order of the states and the proliferation of homonyms that enables us to see the United States from *tous les angles de vue possibles*. In *Mobile* we witness the functioning of *une machinerie descriptive*. It seems to me that the illusion of the absence of a *primus motor* is created as successfully as it is possible to do.

The phrase *une machinerie descriptive* recalls *Degrés*, to which it was first applied by Butor. To conclude comments on *Mobile* I would like to refer to my analysis of Pierre Vernier's investigative method, with its emphasis on reconstruction and its movement from a *foyer* of concrete evidence into the surrounding *zone d'imaginations et de probabilités*. With all this in mind, the following exchanges in the Caruso interview take on a new significance and provide convincing evidence of the continuity between *Degrés* and *Mobile*:

> Butor: "... in fondo, titto è ricordo, il ricordo che ho dell'America: un ricordo che ho molto'ricostruito'."
>
> Caruso: "Ricostruito, immagino in senso husserliano, secondo lo stile a cui lei ci ha abituati, ossia partendo da luminosi nuclei di evidenza per percorrerne gli aloni di penombra sempre più oscura e per trovare in questa opacità le radici e le genesi di quella luce."
>
> Butor: "Esattamente. E non sempre, beninteso, i nuclei di evidenza corrispondono a impressioni dirette che ho avuto durante il mio soggiorno americano, ma molto spesso, a conoscenze acquisite prima di ricarmi sul posto, a previsioni, magari a luoghi communi."[49]

Caruso's description of Butor's treatment of the *luminosi nuclei di evidenza* corresponds perfectly with what I described in the last chapter as the basic movement of *Degrés*. As far as *Mobile* is concerned, the *foyers* or *nuclei* are the *luoghi comuni* (in the fullest sense of the term) and this is represented typographically by the higher case of the place-names which irradiate the surrounding "haloes" of the text in whose opacity lies the source of their brilliance:

> "L'oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle trainée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase."[50]

Mallarmé's sentence might be said to sum up the preceding discussion. His name has not been invoked before this for two reasons. First , almost every critic who has written about *Mobile* has linked it with *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard;* the typographical strangeness of both works make the comparison almost inevitable. Second, a full examination of Mallarmé's influence on *Mobile* would go far beyond the scope of this study. However, one or two points must be made.

The first concerns the concept of the literary work as being "arraché au hasard",[51] to use a phrase frequently employed by Mallarmé, and to which, of course, reference is made in *Un Coup de dés.* The "combat contre le hasard"[52] waged by the writer consists in the imposition of a rigorous form which established the necessity of the relationships linking the various elements of the work. Jean Roudaut described inspiration as the literary form of *le hasard* and suggests that Butor's later works at least, reject inspiration as a generative source at the same time that they attempt to eliminate "... la personnalité de l'écrivain qui fait écran à l'intelligence du monde".[53] But, he adds, this concentration of form, whether on the part of Mallarmé or of Butor, must not be seen as a "... construction intellectuelle et gratuite" but rather as "... la réflexion, sur le papier, de l'order et de l'organisation du monde;". I have tried to demonstrate that this is so of *Mobile*.

The complexity of such a "simulacre dirigé"[54] ensures that a work so constructed will be multivalent, therefore, according to Roudaut:

> "... le hasard ne peut être éliminé, même par un coup de dés. Au plan classique de l'oeuvre il faut substituer une forme mobile c'est-à-dire ouverte et variable, afin que l'oeuvre soit susceptible de développement et de lectures non prévues,"[55]

Butor has indicated on several occasions that the reader has a choice of several itineraries through *Mobile*, each of them sign-posted typographically. In this sense the work is open to variable readings, however, it should be noted that these are all strictly *controlled*, more rigidly so, I should have thought, than in a conventional novel, which is also subject to a variety of interpretations according to the cultural background and reading habits of its readers. Roudaut is correct in his observation that the reader is invited, indeed commanded, to become a co-writer, but this does not mean that he is given *carte blanche*. He is still pressed into the service of Butor's general objective. He is free to choose, but however wide his choice, it is *limited*.[56] It would seem that Butor has carried the war on chance even further than Mallarmé.

My second point concerns the notion of a constellation, already referred to with regard to *Degrés*. The word appears in higher case in *Un coup de dés* and Mallarmé, writing about the poem to Gide, said:

> "La constellation y affectera, d'après des lois exactes, et autant qu'il est permis à un texte imprimé, fatalement une allure de constellation."[57]

Valéry wrote of *Un coup de dés*: "Il a essayé, pensai-je, *d'élever enfin une page à la puissance du ciel étoilé.*"[58] The same could perhaps be said of *Mobile* and about half-way through the book there is a whimsical mirror-image of this ambitious effort which could also be construed as a *hommage à Stéphane Mallarmé*. An exact reproduction of the page perhaps best conveys its impact. The names down the left-hand margin are those of the brightest stars in six constellations.

Le silence de la nuit.

RICHMOND, Etat de l'oeil de chevreuil.

Cornes.

Véga.

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO.

Dents.

Altaïr.

SPRINGFIELD.

Arcturus.

SPRINGFIELD.

Bételgeuse.

WARREN, cf. de Trumbull, Etat de l'oeillet écarlate.

Aldébaran.

OXFORD, Butler.

Régulus.

MONTROSE. - Quand il est trois heures du matin à

MONTROSE,

> "Il y à trois livres qui ont le même format: c'est *Mobile, Description de San Marco,* et *6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde.* Ces trois livres, pour moi, ont beaucoup de rapports. Ils s'enchainent, comme les romans *L'Emploi du temps, La Modification, Degrés,* s'enchainent."
>
> Michel Butor

Although basically of the same physical format, each of the three books, *Mobile, Description de San Marco* and *6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde,* introduces its own variations. A page, taken at random from any one of them is immediately recognisable and distinguishable from a page from either of the others, even without reference to the content (supposing that one is able to look at a page of print without its dissolving into a text.). Probably the most striking feature of *Mobile* from the visual point of view are the incidence of words in higher case and the passages in italics. These occur also in *San Marco* but what impresses one more in this instance is the very beautiful type-face in which the body of the text is set, including the specially designed characters for the titles of each section.[59] *San Marco* is, perhaps, the most beautiful, physically, of Butor's books, apart from his *éditions de luxe.*

In *6,810,000*, what stands out is the relatively small type and the thread of heavy black text that runs through it. Of the three, I found it physically the most disagreeable. It is evident from these remarks that whatever may be the limitations of Butor's later manner, he does succeed in making the reader sensitive to *le livre comme objet* and hence allows him to gain a certain distance from the *transparence* of print and ergo from the transparence of language, for the typography in these books is not mere decoration, but is intimately related to the movement of the text.

It is interesting to speculate therefore, on the extent to which one's reaction to the latter colours one's reaction to the former, and vice versa. For example, the typographical strangeness of *Mobile* may be initially irritating to the reader, the continuing irruption of place-names in higher case, particularly, appearing as an unwelcome intrusion. This may be due, in part, to a failure to appreciate the role of these place-names as pivots on which the text turns, but it is probably because they are pockets of resistance to any attempt at imposing a linear reading, that they are most resented. Thus my opinion that *6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde* is the least attractive of the trio, physically, may be the result of my having found a linear reading of it impossible. Conversely, the beauty of the appearance of *San Marco* in my eyes may derive from the fact that it lends itself more readily to a continuous, if not to a strictly linear reading. Old habits die hard, and it seems that the reader's resistance is more deeply entrenched than that of lookers at pictures or listeners to music. The following remarks of Robert Kanters may be taken as representative of the kind of objection most frequently levelled at Butor's concentration, in his later works, on *le physique du livre*:

> "Il n'est pas vrai, en effet, que les mots soient des choses, des cailloux dont un certain agencement restituera presque mécaniquement la basilique vénitienne ou les chutes de Niagara. Chaque mot est à la fois moins et plus: moins parce qu'il est le produit décoloré, presque abstrait, d'une schématisation linguistique; plus parce qu'il est chargé jusqu'à la gueule de résonances, de réminiscences, de significations. La science de l'agencement des mots, ce n'est pas l'architecture, ni la typographie, c'est la poésie."[60]

The first observation to be made about this statement is that it assumes architecture and typography to be in opposition to poetry, whereas it is manifest that in Butor's view they are constituent of it. Butor, following Mallarmé, has declared that wherever there is "un effort sur le style" there is poetry, but even if we reject this definition as being too broad, it could be argued that even in poetry taken in its most narrow and orthodox sense (i.e. rhymed verse), architecture and typography have played an important part. In the case of the former, there is the spatialisation inherent in a text to be considered, whereas typographical conventions employed in printing poetry are so familiar as to require no further comment. In any case, Butor's intention both in his book on Niagara and in *San Marco* is primarily poetic and Kanters' remark betrays a very limited knowledge of Butor's aesthetics. Secondly, although it would be true to say that *San Marco* and *6,810,000* are attempts to represent, by means of words, the basilica and the falls, in the sense in which *Mobile* is intended to be a representation of the United States, they are as far removed from "the fallacy of imitative form" as we have seen the earlier book to be. I am in agreement with Georges Raillard's opinion that what is involved is not so much *calligrammes*, as practised by Apollinaire, as "... divers traitements de l'espace et de l'écriture, de l'espace même de l'écriture,".[61] At the same time, in the case of *San Marco*, with its rich fund of inscriptions, the basilica itself is "un véritable livre dans l'espace" in which "Les textes du monument épousent ses formes...dépendent bien entendu de son architecture."[62] Butor was avowedly concerned with rendering these inscriptions in a manner similar to their circular disposition in the cupolas of the basilica. He puts the problem in the following terms:

> "Mais dans un livre, comment arriver à faire tourner le texte? Comment le disposer pour qu'il soit, comme dans la basilique, plus ou moins proche ou plus ou moins lointain? C'est pour resoudre ce problème que j'ai été amené à cet mise en pages, notamment à disposer comme je l'ai fait les inscriptions latines."[63]

In order to resolve it, he uses five different margins (the same number as in *Mobile*) and three type-faces, while the inscriptions are all in higher case. To give the effect of movement, these last are often cut off in the middle of a word at the end of the line and the circular disposition of the text in the cupolas is sometimes conveyed by an exact repetition at the end of an account of the pictorial content of the cupola, of the truncated inscription which had ushered it in.[64] However, there is an important difference between the perspective conveyed by the margins in *San Marco* and that established by those in *Mobile*.[65] Whereas the margin furthest from the left in the latter work was meant to indicate the greatest distance from the *état central*, the movement from left to right across the page in *San Marco* seems rather to be one of a "close-up", a zooming-in. One is conscious of focussing on a particular aspect of the basilica. There is a cinematic quality about this which is particularly evident in the opening pages, when the first glimpses of *San Marco* are given as follows, at intervals, the space in between being filled with the crowd in the piazza:

> "Quelques colonnes entrevues entre les deux doigts de cette main aux ongles étincelants.
>
> . . . .
>
> Un coupole apparaissant entre deux verres de jus de fruits.
>
> . . . .
>
> Entre deux ailes de pigeons en vol, un clocheton d'or et de plomb.
>
> . . . .

> Tous ces petits personnages que l'on voit passer
> devant les colonnes, ceux qui font des signes
> sur le balcon.
>
> . . . .
>
> L'éclat du soleil cuivré sur la grande baie.
>
> . . . .
>
> L'ombre d'un nuage bas qui passe, l'ombre
> d'un envol de pigeons.
>
> Les cinq portes, les cinq coupoles." (Pp. 10-13).

This is poetry. It also conveys an extremely vivid impression of the approach to the basilica, one which is, incidentally, remarkably similar to Ruskin's description, also deeply moving, though in an utterly different mode. A comparison of the two, which cannot be undertaken here, would invalidate neither, since both are the work of consummate artists, but would reveal that Butor at once acknowledges his predecessor by adopting to some extent the same perspective, in the spatial sense, while his historical perspective is radically different. That is to say that his use of language and the quality of his vision is eminently of the twentieth century. Homage is done to Ruskin but there is absolutely no attempt to *maquiller ses rides*.

But to return to Kanters' objection: it contains perhaps a small germ of validity in the sentence which states that a word is both more and less than a thing:

> "...moins parce qu'il est le produit décoloré, presque abstrait, d'une schématisation linguistique, plus parce qu'il est chargé jusqu'à la gueule de résonances, de réminiscences, de significations."

It is clear that Kanters raises here, however inappropriately, the question of whether language can be treated as a plastic substance; a question which parallels my earlier inquiry as to whether it could be treated as pure sonority. This is a question which readers of Butor (and perhaps Butor himself) must inevitably face. Kanters' remarks are inappropriate because the *agencement des mots* in *6,810,888* and in *San Marco* is successful. But is this true of all Butor's later work? Kanters has perhaps put his finger unwittingly on an ambiguity which is basic to the treatment of language in Butor's second period: that is that words are used visually (i.e. as forms) and associatively (i.e. as repositories of meaning) at the same time. There is a very delicate balance involved in this procedure, which is, by and large, maintained in the works under consideration in this chapter. It is a question of a trick of reflection by which language oscillates between opacity and transparency. This is illustrated in *San Marco* by the effort the reader continually makes to *visualise* the basilica and its mosaics *through* the description. One frequently longs for pictures to put alongside the text, frustrated by the resisting density of the words. In fact *San Marco*, which was commissioned, was originally conceived as a coffee-table book, Butor's text being an accompaniment to the illustrations. Significantly, however, as he remarked to Claude Couffon:

> "... à mesure que je travaillais, le texte a pris tant d'importance, que j'ai préferé le donner sans images. C'était d'ailleurs la seule façon qu'on le lise, car dans ce genre d'ouvrage, on ne regarde en général que les illustrations."

The importance of this statement in regard to the books entitled *Illustrations* should be noted. As far as *San Marco* is concerned, its description, in words, if endured in all its opacity, is eventually irradiated with "the light that never was on sea or land".

San Marco is the first of Butor's books to integrate the back cover, "... cette quatrième page de couverture", with the text. It bears an address from Butor to the reader, in which he evokes his predecessors, Proust "le luxueux forçat dans sa fameuse cellule de liège:" and "... le méconnu John Ruskin.", and ends with the following sentence:

> "Hommage, acceptez donc comme tel, vous lecteur
> qui cherchez à entendre et voir,
>
> DESCRIPTION DE SAN MARCO
>
> Michel Butor"

The verb *entendre* means to understand, as well as to hear, but its auditory connotation is particularly important in this instance. *San Marco* is dedicated to Igor Stravinsky, whose *Cantique* in honour of Saint Mark's Butor greatly admires and about whom he has said:

> "Enfin, Stravinsky a probablement tiré mon attention sur la sonorité de l'espace dans la basilique de Saint-Marc. Sans lui je me serais peut-être contente de voir, sans prèter attention à ce qu'on entend.."[66]

On page 77 of *San Marco* we read that:

> "Toute une école de musique s'est développée à Saint-Marc, utilisant les dispositions remarquables de l'édifice, composant avec plusieurs choeurs de voix ou d'instruments, disposés à des endroits choisis pour qu'ils se répondissent ou se fissent écho, réalisant une polyphonie spatiale dont nous commençons seulement à retrouver les secrets:"

stereophonic sound, in fact. But music is not the only type of sonority which figures in Butor's book. There is also the multilingual murmur of the crowd surging through the piazza and the Basilica, which is represented in the text by recurring passages in italics:

> "De cette bruine de Babel, de ce constant ruissellement, je n'ai pu saisir que l'écume pour la faire courir en filigrane de page en page, pour les en baigner, pour en pénétrer les blancs plus ou moins marqués du papier entre les blocs, les piliers de mon construction à l'image de celle de Saint-Marc."[67] (P. 13).

The way in which sound is represented as liquid, in this passage, and is thus assimilated with the waters which lap the foundations of Saint Mark's is impressive. The reference to Babel indicates a recurrent theme in Butor's writing[68] and the tenor of the sentence provides a valuable guide to the construction of the book, which seems to me to be among the most convincing, because most *necessary* of Butor's later works.

San Marco is therefore, by a paradox typical of Butor, an *audio-visual* guide to the basilica, sound and illustration being rendered in words. As he points out on the back cover:

> "Tout ce texte est tourné vers son illustration, c'est-à-dire le monument lui-même, et ne pourra prendre toute sa vertu qu'après avoir été baigné en lui comme dans une eau."

In this he follows Ruskin, who illustrates his chapter on Saint Mark's with one small plate, showing a fragment of one of the archivolts, which is given, he says, "... not to illustrate the thing itself, but to illustrate the impossibility of illustration."

Sonority, the refusal of illustration, the mobility of the text, the wide range of typographical devices (put here to exceptionally successful use) all of these facets of *San Marco* are further developed in *6,810,000* and later works; some of them had already made their appearance in earlier books. It is to be noted especially, perhaps, in passing to the book on Niagara, that this last is *une étude stéréophinique* and that its principle element is, of course, water. The itinerary from *Mobile*, through *San Marco* to *6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde* could be described as a passage from "le père des fleuves" to the

Bride of the Adriatic, and thence to "Le voile de la mariée."[69]

A final comment remains to be made about *San Marco*, however, and that concerns the principle feature of the basilica: its mosaics. The similarities between the art of the mosaicist and the disposition of Butor's later books hardly needs to be emphasised. The likeness between a mosaic and a patchwork quilt provides an element of continuity between *Mobile* and *San Marco*. But the mosaics of the Venetian church are not only remarkable for their brilliant colour (in particular an *or sombre* which impressed Butor) and their narrative power, but also for the inscriptions which they at once incorporate and illustrate. Ruskin's comment on this feature is highly pertinent to an understanding of Saint Mark's, while at the same time, by a curious anachronism, it is remarkably apposite to Butor's work and hence deserves to be quoted in full:

> "Our eyes are now familiar and wearied with writing; and if an inscription is put upon a building, unless it be large and clear, it is ten to one whether we ever trouble ourselves to decipher it. But the old architect was sure of readers. He knew that everyone would be glad to decipher all he wrote; that they would rejoice in possessing the vaulted leaves of his manuscript; and that the more he gave them the more grateful would the people be. We must take some pains therefore, when we enter Saint Mark's, to read all that is inscribed, or we shall not penetrate into the feeling either of the builder or of his times."[70]

Butor certainly obeys this injunction to the letter. How appropriate after all that his description of *San Marco* should be in words, given the importance attached to them by the artists who embellished it. With regard to the relevance of Ruskin's remarks to his own work, it is evident that his insistence on the visual qualities of the book is to some extent directed at counteracting the reader's weariness with writing. The necessity to "read all that is inscribed" where Butor's work is concerned, requires no further comment. Perhaps it was of mosaics that Kanters was thinking when he challenged Butor's treatment of words as if they were *des cailloux*. If so he neglected to take account of the etymology of mosaic, which comes from the Greek *mousa*, Muse.[71]

Water is an important theme in Butor's work. It appears in all of his books in one or several of its guises: the sea, rivers, lakes, ponds, even sublimated in clouds, and more figuratively, in such expressions as "l'eau de mon regard" *(L'Emploi du temps)* or "l'eau des foules" *(San Marco)*. While it is frequently a question of what one critic has called "the waters of oblivion"[72] and therefore of a hostile element, this is not always the case. Water has beneficent qualities too. What could be more curative, for example, than the *bain de jouvence*, a concept which both Proust and Butor value. Perhaps the latter's ambivalent attitude to water is best rendered figuratively in the point which he himself makes in *San Marco*, that the basilica represents at once the Ark of Noah and the Promised Land: that is to say, a refuge against the waters of oblivion but also a land of milk and honey which could only be reached by crossing a desert, a feat made possible because Moses caused water to gush from the rock, "'Donne-nous de l'eau ... que nous buvions!'" (P. 61). The influence of Gaston Bachelard on this thematic preoccupation of Butor's cannot be discounted, neither can the fact that Butor has been an attentive reader of Freud. Both Venice and Niagara are traditionally places of pilgrimage for honeymoon couples. This is referred to in *San Marco*:

> "Ceux qui viennent pour leur voyage de noces, ceux qui viennent pour se rappeler leur voyage de noces, ceux qui n'avaient pas pu se payer le voyage lors de leurs noces, et qui aujourd'hui enfin, comme les affaires ne marchent pas trop mal, ... Toutes ces alliances, toutes ces bagues, toute cette poussière d'or qui saupoudre la foule." (P. 13),

and the same kind of litany is repeated throughout *6,810,000*, where the basic relationship is that of the couple, whether sanctioned by church and/or state or not. One of the features of the book on Niagara, in fact, is its vein of sexuality, more overt, than in any of its predecessors.

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The Niagara Falls is certainly the most impressive body of water treated by Butor and it must be conceded that *6,810,000* does convey the volume and power of the falls far more vividly than does the flat statement of the quantity of water which is carried over them per second.[73] The mind finds it difficult to form any conception of figures of this magnitude, and so, impressive as they are, they have very little power to move. The contrast between the weight and acceleration of the text and the abstraction and stasis of the title is an effect deliberately sought by Butor. In the course of reading *6,810,000* one experiences in a very concrete manner the appalling force, the deafening roar, the mystery, the challenge and the beauty of the great torrent.

In Jean Roudaut's view:

> "... le véritable sujet du livre n'est ni la cataracte (aucune description nouvelle n'en est tentée) ni les rapports de l'homme et du monde ni ceux de la culture et de la nature; ce livre est le récit d'une lecture.",[74]

the *lecture* in question being that of Chateaubriand's description of the falls. I find rather that the book is all of these things; an account of a reading certainly, not simply of Chateaubriand's text but of the world, which Butor has called "... un grand livre qu'on feuillète."

6,810,000 is linked with each of the other works studied in this chapter. Like *Réseau Aérien* it is a *texte radiophonique* but the sound has been developed from mono to stereo, perhaps as a result of the experience with *San Marco*. It may also be regarded as a close-up of one of the squares that made up the patchwork quilt of *Mobile*. Just as the visual itineraries, signposted by margins and type-faces, have become so compelling in *6,810,000* as to make a linear reading impossible, so the auditory dimension of the text has also become multi-facetted, permitting selective listening as well as selective reading.

The importance of Chateaubriand's text, however, should not be under-estimated. The book opens with two descriptions of the falls, one written in 1797, the other in 1801 and revealing the change that had taken place at Niagara within that short period, a change which has since been magnified a hundred-fold. These descriptions, with variations, are interwoven right through the book while the second of them is given again, verbatim, but with a different typographical disposition, at the end, where it forms a sort of coda. Butor has said that he used Chateaubriand's text not as a quotation, but as *une matière première*. That is to say that he took Chateaubriand's sentences as "un univers linguistique réduit" (Entretiens, 147), a paradigm of the linguistic resources from which the writer chooses the words for the elaboration of his text. In this particular case, the *univers linguistique* has already suffered the transmutation of syntax, the words are already related to each other in a certain way. Throughout his book on Niagara, Butor composes variations on these *éléments syntaxiques* so that Chateaubriand's text seems to fall down the pages with all the swirl and roar and rainbow brilliance of the Falls themselves. He has said that he *accelerates* Chateaubriand's words, setting them in motion "en fabriquant des canons"[75] while at the same time squeezing the text as if it were a lemon, in order to yield "des images nouvelles" as a result of "le choc de deux mots."[76]

The musical dimension of *6,810,000* is not limited to these canonical variations, however. There is also the treatment of the various couples in the book whose names vary from chapter to chapter but who frequently share the same initials, an index of the similarity of their situations, which run the gamut from A to Q. The parallel here with serial music seems undeniable. In addition, a "chromatic" dimension is added to the book by the numerous and detailed references to flowers. These last of course are a natural feature of Niagara, but they are also "un point de fixation onirique extraordinaire" and have a profound sexual significance, very appropriate to the place which is a sort of shrine to defloration. (There is a rather moving description of this rite of passage in the book.) It is by means of the dazzling colours of the flowers described, which are assimilated with the illumination of the Falls during the tourist season that Butor operates "... d'un bout à l'autre du poème une composition chromatique contrôlée." (Entretiens, 184). This exploitation of a series was also a feature of *Mobile*, although this seems to have escaped the notice of all but one of the critics, Robert André. He, however, described this aspect of the work admirably and his remarks can be applied with perhaps even more force to *6,810,000*.

> "La forme révèle d'abord un souci d'ordre imité de la musique sérielle. On choisit une série de thèmes ou d'images dont l'oeuvre entière dérive strictement. Comme l'explique Thomas Mann, hanté lui aussi par la relation entre l'écriture et la musique: 'Aucun de ces tons n'aurait le droit de se présenter qui ne remplît sa fonction du motif dans la construction générale. Il n'y aurait plus une note libre. Voilà ce que j'appellerais une écriture rigoureuse."77

Butor's variations on Chateaubriand and the permutations and combinations that he operates on the series of couples are prime examples of such *une écriture rigoureuse*.

6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde has been called, with justice, I think, the most musical of Butor's works. What then of the reservations which I expressed earlier regarding the application of musical techniques to writing, with special reference to the problem of rendering polyphony? If the book on Niagara succeeds, which it does, this is largely due to the introduction of the device of stereophonic sound. This means that the ten different itineraries or *voies* open to the reader (the *double entendre* voie/voix should be noted) have their parallel in the choice the listener can make among the different voices, by simple adjustment of the controls. As Butor points out in the text:

> "On a donc une double variabilité: à l'émission, l'exécutant aura choisi l'une des dix voies; à le réception, l'auditeur pourra changer de place à l'intérieur de l'architecture transmise."[78]

Polyphony can be controlled in the interests of intelligibility. Although a single silent reader of a text can never achieve a truly polyphonic reading, the nearest one can get to it in a work such as the one under discussion would be to read it straight through. But, this is totally unsatisfactory if not quite impossible. *6,810,000* seems to mark a deeper understanding on Butor's part of the limitations involved in the analogy between music and language.

It seems appropriate at this point to discuss briefly the reasons why many readers, myself included, have at least initially, resisted the invitation to choose one of the variety of itineraries proposed in each of Butor's later works. Why do we stubbornly reject the mobility he offers us? No doubt the *idée consacrée du livre* has a lot to do with it, coupled with a certain instinctive distrust of novelty. We are inclined to think with Dr. Johnson, that "Nothing odd will live long," though he gave a rather inappropriate example when he went on to say "Tristram Shandy did not last." I am inclined to think, however, that our loyalty to a linear progression is an impulse of essentially puritanical origin. Linear reading might be said to proceed at right-angles to the book and Butor has pointed out the puritan predilection for the right-angle, as evidenced by certain architectural features of the United States. Significantly, this same predilection is present in the work of Piet Mondrian and in Butor's own work, notably *Degrés* which was written "dans la passion de l'angle droit." Asked in an interview "Pourquoi vos romans sont-ils si puritains?", his reply was:

> "Est-ce qu'ils sont si puritains? Je n'en sais rien. Cette question est intéressante parce que je pense qu'il y avait dans mes livres un certain puritanisme. Il vient de mon éducation chrétienne, naturellement, et il a peut-être été accentué par mon séjour en Angleterre. Mais dans les livres qui ont suivi il y a une libération de plus en plus grande et qui veut procéder avec douceur."[79]

Puritanisme must be understood here in a wider context than the reticence with regard to sexual matters to which it is frequently reduced, though doubtless that element too is present. I have commented on the emphasis on sexuality in *6,810,000*, a feature which was discernible, though in a more diluted form in *Mobile*. What is more important here, is a certain inflexibility, a desire for a rigid order, a distrust of facility, which when pushed to extremes becomes a love of difficulty for its own sake, a dedication to duty, in a word, austerity. It is this kind of puritanism that impells one to reject the choices offered at the beginning of *6,810,000*, say. The conscientious reader instinctively regards skipping as an abnegation of responsibility. He will begin at the beginning and read through to the end, whatever the cost.

To be fair, his experience with Butor's earlier work would have confirmed him in this attitude; this is where Butor's puritanism comes in. The reader, as co-author, was expected to exert an effort comparable in intensity to his own, in writing the book. Intended as a journey of self-discovery (an intention which persists in Butor's work) the first novels gave no overt instructions on how to proceed; the reader had to fend for himself. Thus we are faced with the startling conclusion that *Romanesque 2* may in fact represent a simplification of Butor's method and hence a reduction of the activity of the reader, which had attained its maximum intensity in the uncharted territory of *Romanesque I*. It may be that Butor had profited by the experience of one of his own characters, Pierre Vernier, to whom Yeats's words might apply:

> "The fascination of what's difficult
> Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
> Spontaneous joy and natural content
> Out of my heart."

However, it would be going too far to say that this heralds a return to passivity on the part of the reader. It must be remembered that the urge toward identification, the "losing of oneself", always a hazard in *Romanesque I* is countered in *Romanesque 2* by a shift in emphasis from the individual to the collective. A delicate balance is established between what Ernst Fischer calls this "'Dionysian' losing of oneself" and the:

> "...'Apollonian' element of entertainment and satisfaction which consists precisely in the fact that the onlooker does *not* identify himself with what is represented but *gains distance* from it, overcomes the direct power of reality through its *deliberate representation*, and finds in art, that happy freedom of which the burdens of everyday life deprive him? And is not the same duality -on the one hand the absorption in reality, on the other the excitement of controlling it- also evident in the way the artist himself works?"[80]

This seems a fitting note on which to bring to an end this discussion of *Romanesque 2*, which began with *une étude pour une représentation des Etats-Unis*, and of this section of it, which opened with the proposition that an awareness of *le livre comme objet* enabled one to gain a certain distance from the mesmeric print.

But to what general conclusion does this necessarily limited discussion of *Romanesque 2* lead? Everything that we have learned through Butor up to this point would indicate that in any case, the conclusion can be no more than a provisional one. Nonetheless it would be legitimate to ask what has been achieved in *Romanesque 2* and to re-consider briefly the critical reaction it has aroused.

The scandal provoked by Butor's later works, particularly perhaps *Mobile* and *6,810,000* was based on the assumption that they constituted an attack on the book. The *idée consacrée du livre* was seen to be challenged. It is true that Butor wished to revolutionise our attitudes to books and to reading, but as he remarked in an interview: "Je ne suis pas iconoclaste." Aware of the startling developments in communications and of the advances in the technology of book-production itself, he insists that the book is still necessary:

> "... parce que le fait de rendre *visible* ce
> qui était audible, de rendre *simultané* ce
> qui était successif, c'est cela même qui permet
> d'étudier le langage."

However:

> Ce que nous ne pouvons dénier - et ce que nous espérons d'ailleurs - c'est que ces nouveaux procédés modifieront considérablement le physionomie et le style des livres que nous ferons demain."[81]

He believes that we are confronted with the same problem that had to be faced when writing was first invented: how to inscribe words on objects so that they could be preserved. Although we possess a variety of objects in which to preserve them directly (tape-recordings or records, for example) in order to study their relationships and their structure it is necessary, in Butor's view, to *les étaler sur des surfaces*. This phrase is perhaps at the root of the *référence plastique/discours littéraire* nexus in Butor's work. Its reference to painting is evident; it is also linked with music, as far as Butor is concerned:

> "... un peintre couvre de traces des surfaces (ceci nous rappelle qui l'écriture n'est qu'un cas particulier du dessin), il arrive qu'il insère des lettres dans sa toile. Inversement, n'importe quel bloc de lettres peut être considéré dans sa figure. Le rapport peut donc être étroit entre le graveur, le dessinateur, le peintre et l'écrivain. Le musicien, quant à lui, se trouve plus que jamais devant les mêmes problèmes que l'écrivain: il est préoccupé de trouver l'écriture de la partition, de rendre visible l'audible pour en faire un objet d'étude. Il y a donc là un faisceau de travaux convergents qui suscitent la collaboration."

The emphasis on *pour en faire un objet d'étude* as the objective of art effectively underlines Butor's rejection of the book as a *divertissement*. It would be equally wrong to see in the formalist aspect of his later work a mandarin-like withdrawal from the real world: "... le livre est pour moi un moyen de connaître le monde et d'agir sur lui." This high purpose is combined with a profound modernity which for him implies a true respect for tradition. Hence, the revolution in book-production "... devrait nous conduire à reviser l'histoire du livre, à nous en rendre sensible des aspects anciens oubliés."

I have suggested that it is possible that Butor's later manner represents a simplification, despite first impressions to the contrary. But there is another side to the coin in that it also represents greater control, on his part, of the reading of his works. In his brilliant essay "A propos de la lecture", Roudaut points out that the lapsus is the common characteristic of all our reading and demonstrates "... le multitude de contresens dont est faite toute lecture."[82] This is hard for the writer to control; we have seen the false readings from which Butor's early novels suffered and the chapter on *Degrés* postulated that Butor may have begun by that time to ask himself how far he had succeeded in making his real intentions understood. Although he doesn't mention Butor, perhaps Roudaut has hit on one of the most important reasons behind the mobility proposed in *Romanesque 2* when he says:

> "... si l'auteur est dans l'incapacité d'éliminer ces lectures, qui dépendent d'une autre liberté que la sienne et peuvent être incompatibles, il doit en prévoir un certain nombre, les faire correspondre à des niveaux de pensée différents."

It should be noted that though there are twenty-five possible conclusions to the opera *Votre Faust*, every one of them has been written by the author.

Perhaps the message of *Romanesque 2* is simply that the raw material of literature is *language*, not the world, but that equally, it is by and through language that the world is structured so that to be, as co-author, "aux prises avec les mots",[83] is to "connaître le monde et agir sur lui."

[1] Jean Roudaut, "Parenthèse sur la place occupée par l'étude intitulée '6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde' parmi les autres ouvrages de Michel Butor", *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, XXVIII, 165, (septembre 1966), 498-509.

[2] Pierre-Henri Simon, *Le Monde*, 22 avril 1964.

[3] Pierre Daix, "Avec Michel Butor".

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Michel Butor a réponse à tous", *Le Figaro*, 4 juin 1971, p. 30.

[6] Daix, op. cit.

[7] "Michel Butor a réponse à tous".

[8] Harry Levin, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*, revised and augmented edition, New Directions Paperbook No. 87 (New York: New Directions 1960), p. 208.

[9] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York, O.U.P., 1959), p. 1.

[10] "Michel Butor a réponse à tous".

[11] Ibid.

[12] Paris: Gallimard, 1962. Achevé d'imprimé le 7 février 1962.

[13] Paris: Gallimard, 1962. Achevé d'imprimé le 5 novembre 1962. This text was commissioned by the R.T.F. and was first broadcast on 16th June 1962, the anniversary of Bloomsday, a coincidence of which Butor was probably aware.

[14] See F. C. St. Aubyn, "A propos de 'Mobile': Deuxième Entretien avec Michel Butor," *French Review*, XXXVIII, pp. 427-440. In reply to the question:

"... est-ce que j'ai raison de trouver dans *Mobile* un voyage de quarante-huit heures à travers les Etats-Unis avec deux heures pour récupérer, pour ainsi dire, les variations dans le temps moyen?"

Butor says:

"Il y a toutes sortes de voyages possibles à l'intérieur des pages de *Mobile* mais on ne peut pas considérer qu'il y a un voyageur qui commence son voyage en Alabama et qui au bout de quarante-huit heures termine son voyage à Buffalo ou à Wyoming."

Compare with R.-M. Albérès, *Michel Butor*, p. 93:

"... *Mobile* ne signifie rien pour qui n'a pas visité à trois cents à l'heure les Etats-Unis..."

[15] Butor, Daix interview.

[16] L.S. Roudiez, *Michel Butor*, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, 9 (New York, 1965), p. 37.

[17] Michael Spencer, "Architecture and Poetry in 'Réseau Aérien'," *Modern Language Review*, 63, 1968, pp. 57-65.

[18] Roland Barthes, "Littérature et Discontinu," *Essais Critiques*, pp. 175-188, p. 176.

[19] Butor, *Le Figaro*, 4 juin 1971. He goes on to point out that of course in the second *Génie du lieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) he continues to employ the tools used in *Mobile*. A study of these two *Génie du lieu* remains to be done. A comparison should yield some useful insights on the ground covered by Butor in the interval between one and two.

[20] F. C. St. Aubyn, "A propos de 'Mobile'," p. 427.

[21] See Butor's remark to St. Aubyn: "...il y a des figures typographiques, des mots ou des phrases qui sont reliés par une figure typographique exactement comme ils seraient reliés par des outils grammaticaux, par une conjonction." (P. 431).

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[22] See Raymond Jean, "L'Amérique Immobile," à propos de *Mobile* de Michel Butor," *Europe*, no. 403-404, nov.-déc. 1962, pp. 338/344. "Tous les reportages, récits de voyage, documents sur l'Amérique ... ont échoué en ceci qu'ils ont accumulé à l'usage du lecteur des renseignements et des réflexions critiques sur cette terre périodiquement découverte mais ne lui ont jamais permis d'en avoir une intuition concrète, une sorte de vision, de perception sensorielle qui seule coinciderait réelement avec ce qu'ils verraient s'ils y étaient soudain transportés." (P. 448).

[23] Jean Roudaut, "Parenthèse," p. 507.

[24] See Anon., "The Neo-Realists," *Time*, LXXX (July 20, 1962), p. 81.

Truman Capote, "The $6.00 misunderstanding," *The New York Review of Books* I, no. 2 (1963), pp. 14-15.

Raymond Federman, "Une lecture américaine de *Mobile*," *Le Monde* (*des livres*) 22 mars 1967, p. IV.

These reviews are all basically unfavourable.

[25] Anon. "A View from Outside," *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 4, 1962, p. 169.

[26] See Léon S. Roudiez, "Gloses sur les premières pages de *Mobile* de Michel Butor," *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 87, No. 6, November 1972.

Professor Roudiez provides some interesting glosses which have aided my understanding of *Mobile*. However, when he sees in Alaska, "pays des ours", a reference to the Soviet Union and the threat of Communism, he seems to be exhibiting the same kind of *hantise* which Butor attributes to the white population of America vis-à-vis the Blacks. Of course, even if this is so, it could be construed as a proof of the accuracy of Butor's assessment of the American mentality.

[27] "Michel Butor a reponse à tous."

[28] See F. C. St. Aubyn, op. cit. "Là dans *Mobile*, comme déjà dans *Degrés*, j'ai pris des citations, quelquefois d'assez longues citations, que j'ai traitées comme si elles étaient des mots. Il y a une grammaire de l'arrangement de ces textes les uns avec les autres. (P. 437).

[29] Harry Levin, op. cit., p. 184.

[30] Paulo Caruso, "Intervista a Michel Butor", *Aut Aut*, No. 68, Marzo 1962, pp. 165-171, p. 168.

[31] Ibid.

[32] R.-M. Albérès,"Qu'est-ce que le 'structuralisme' dans la littérature?"

[33] Jean Roudaut, op. cit., p. 507.

[34] Ibid., p. 500.

[35] Mary McCarthy, *On the Contrary*, (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1961), pp. 24-31.

[36] McCarthy, op. cit., p. 7.

[37] Ibid., p. 19.

[38] Roudiez, op. cit., p. 88.

[39] Butor, "Entrevue avec André Alter", *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 24 mai 1958.

[40] Martine Cadieu, "Entretien avec Michel Butor," *Les Lettres Françaises*, 2 fevrier, 1967.

[41] H. R., "Michel Butor," *Les Lettres Françaises*, 1178, 13 avril 1967, pp. 6-7. Butor emphasises the importance of quotations in criticism, from which we may deduce the critical value of quotation, or parody, in his work. See "La critique et l'invention".

[42] Ibid.

[43] It is important to distinguish between the value Butor attaches to *conscious* parody and his condemnation of those who "... prennent des livres célèbres d'autrefois et maquillent leurs rides." In the sentence, "La formule du roman habituel est donc tout simplement une sorte de parodie.", (R. 3, p. 9) the word *parodie* is used pejoratively. The kind of parodistic link Butor himself makes in his books with the *formule du roman habituel* is done with a critical intention.

This whole question of parody leads one to reflect ruefully on the degree to which the first four novels were intended to be *parodies* of the *roman habituel*. The switch in Jean Roudaut's critical approach to Butor from a thematic to a formal one seems to indicate reflection of this order. However, he says:

> "Si la lecture fut momentanée, du moins fut-elle nécessaire. Les thèmes en lesquels on put voir la substance des romans de Butor paraissent ici creux comme un doigt de gant. Mais parodier est encore un moyen de s'attacher." (Parenthèse, p. 503).

[44] Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, Trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), p. 76.

[45] Caruso, p. 170.

[46] Butor, Entrevue avec André Alter.

[47] Clifton's Cafeteria sounds incredible. It is reminiscent of Waugh's *The Loved One*, at once hilariously funny and pathetic in its monumental vulgarity and its cynical exploitation of a people's need for religion, albeit homogenised, emulsified and saran-wrapped.

[48] Roudiez remarks that the irony of this passage presupposes the presence of an observer. Curiously, Mary McCarthy also introduces the Nazi analogy, though in a slightly different context. She says of the American, tempted to lock the visiting tourist in his hotel room: "His contention that the visible and material America is not the real or the only one is more difficult to sustain than was the presumption of the 'other' Germany behind the Nazi steel." (Op. cit.)

[49] Caruso, p. 167.

[50] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 366.

[51] See Mallarmé, p. 368, 387.

[52] This phrase is used by Roudaut, op. cit., p. 508: "... le prestigieux et minutieux calcul que représente l'oeuvre butorienne constitue un combat contre le hasard," and also by Roland Barthes in "L'Activité Structuraliste," *Essais Critiques* (P. 217): "... l'oeuvre d'art est ce que l'homme arrache au hasard". His description of *l'activité structuraliste* is very useful for a study of Butor's work.

[53] Roudaut, "Mallarmé et Butor - a gossip - ," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, no. 58, 1964, pp. 29-33.

[54] Barthes, "L'Activité structuraliste," p. 214.

[55] Roudaut, op. cit., p. 31.

[56] See for instance his remarks regarding the possible variations in his opera *Votre Faust* to Caruso: "No, non si tratterà tanto d'improvvisazione, come nella commedia dell'arte, quanto piuttosto d'una libertà di scelta fra varie soluzioni egualmente possibili, ma rigorosamenta previste.

[57] Mallarmé, 1582.

[58] Valéry, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol.1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 627.

[59] These were designed, appropriately, by an Italian. "Le caractère des titres a été dessiné par Aldo Novarese pour la fonderie Palatina." *(Description de San Marco).*

[60] Robert Kanters, "Le Niagara de Michel Butor," *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 14-20 octobre 1965.

[61] Georges Raillard, "Référence plastique et discours littéraire chez Michel Butor."

[62] Claude Couffon, "Une interview sur *Description de San Marco*." *Les lettres françaises*, 1008, décembre 1963.

[63] Ibid.

[64] See the double-page spread 53, with its two unfinished inscriptions, reading "HIC ISMAELITAE VENDUNT JOSEPH PU," which enclose the tale of Joseph and Putiphar's wife and his debut as an interpreter of dreams. The device of the double-page spread was inaugurated in *Mobile* and probably was inspired by *Un coup de dés*. It has the effect of making all the page numbers uneven and *Mobile* has a pagination which goes from 13 to 333.

[65] See F. C. St. Aubyn, "Butor's America" for a detailed account by Butor of the function of the various typographical devices in *Mobile*.

[66] Couffon, op. cit.

[67] It is interesting that sound is commonly said to be transmitted in waves and that Butor likens the foam that he has skimmed off the *bruine de Babel* to a *water-mark*, flowing from page to page. Ruskin too uses the word "foam" in a striking way in his description of the facade of Saint Mark's, which ends:

> "... until at last, as if in ecstasy, the crests of the arches break into a marble foam, and toss themselves into the blue sky in flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray, as if the breakers on the Lido shore had been frost-bound before they fell, and the sea-nymphs had inlaid them with coral and amethyst." *Stones of Venice*, p. 74.

Note that exotic colours such as coral and amethyst are supplied in Butor's text by the names of nail varnishes, e.g. *coral ice*.

[68] See for example his essay "Babel en creux" (R 2, pp. 199-215), and his avowedly dearest wish: to have the gift of languages. There is a reference to the reverse image of the Tower of Babel in the New Testament, the gift of tongues conferred on the apostles on Pentecost Sunday, in *San Marco*, pp. 87-89. This takes the form of the sonorous list of peoples speaking different tongues: Parthians, Medes, Elamites and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, which the mosaicist had inscribed and which Butor completes, as he frequently does, with a quotation from the New Testament.

[69] That is, the Mississippi River, frequently referred to in *Mobile* and incidentally frequently explored by John James Audobon on account of its being the major fly-way for migratory birds in the United States. "Le voile de la mariée", the Bridal Veil, is the name of part of one of the falls at Niagara.

[70] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol 2 (London: Routledge, no date), p. 123.

[71] It was Mary McCarthy who drew my attention to this etymology in her essay on "Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*," *The Writing on the Wall and Other Literary Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1970), pp. 42-54. According to her account Burroughs also favours the mosaic, "especially in its scientific sense of a plant-mottling caused by a virus,".

[72] See John Sturrock, *The French New Novel*, p. 108. "Like Robbe-Grillet, Butor makes use of water in his novels, to stand for what is without form, the darkness that precedes expression, the ground against which whatever exists must stand out." Perhaps, but there are also "the waters of purification" referred to by Roudaut as "l'eau lustrale" which figure in *La Modification* and in *San Marco* and which are perhaps represented by the sea in *Mobile*.

[73] According to Michael Spencer, see article named below, *6,810,000 litres d'eau* is not an accurate figure for "le débit moyen des chutes de Niagara" as Butor stated to Charbonnier (Entretiens, 135), but this matters little, given the meaninglessness of numbers once they pass a certain size.

[74] Roudaut, "Parenthèse sur la place occupée par l'étude intitulée '6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde' parmi les autres ouvrages de Michel Butor," pp. 505-506.

[75] Entretiens, 145. Michael Spencer's article, "Son et *Lumière* at the Niagara Falls," *Australian Journal of French Studies*, Melbourne, 6, ('69), pp. 101-112, contains a detailed analysis of what he calls the "fugal nature of Butor's text". The acceleration of the text to which Butor refers was also a feature of *L'Emploi du temps* and of *Degrés*.

[76] This procedure, which is further developed in Butor's later poetry, not always perhaps with the same success, would seem to be an indication that he is, as a number of critics have pointed out, "dans la ligneée surréaliste ."

[77] Robert André, "L'Amérique et l'Enfer," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 10e année no. 6, juin 1962, pp. 1088-1093. Joyce, too, exploited the series in this way. See Butor, "Joyce et le roman moderne" *L'Arc*, no. 36, pp. 4-5.

> "Dans *Finnegans Wake*, il s'est éfforcé d'explorer tous les groupes possibles quel que soit le nombre de leurs éléments. Chaque fois que dans son texte quelque chose peut être considéré comme le membre d'un groupe bien connu, Joyce va utiliser tous les autres membres. Si par exemple, un personnage s'appelle Jean comme Jean fait partie des quatre évangélistes et des douze apôtres, Joyce introduira les trois autres évangélistes et les douze autres apôtres, et ainsi de suite...
>
> On voit à quel point la pratique de Joyce se rapproche de celle des musiciens et en particulier des plus modernes de ceux-ci."

[78] P. 20 (a number arrived at by a process of deduction)

[79] "Michel Butor a reponse à tous"

[80] Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*, trans. Anna Bostock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 9.

[81] Henri Ronse, "Le livre futur, Entretien avec Michel Butor," *Synthèses*, no. 248, janvier 1967, pp. 101-107, p. 103 from which the quotations immediately following have also been drawn.

[82] Jean Roudaut, "A propos de la lecture," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 30, 1967, pp. 279-290, p. 283.

[83] Ibid.

The Smithy of the Soul

> "Les ouvrages parus et ceux à paraître embrasseront ainsi dans leur ensemble le plan que s'est proposé l'auteur, quand il a donné pour sous-titre à son oeuvre celui de *Voyages dans les Mondes connus et inconnus*. Son but est, en effet de résumer toutes les connaissances géographiques, géologiques, physiques, astronomiques, amassées par la science moderne, et de refaire, sous la forme attrayante qui lui est propre, l'histoire de l'univers."
>
> Hetzel

The writer in question is Jules Verne but the ambition ascribed to him, of Faustian amplitude, does not surpass Butor's, whose *oeuvre*, too, might easily be sub-titled *Voyages dans les Mondes connus et inconnus*. The journey, both spiritual and temporal, is central to Butor's work. *La Modification* is the prime example of this but there is also the notion of the periplum as it is developed in *Degrés* and the books discussed in the last chapter all involve travel. It is perhaps simplistic to distinguish sharply between spiritual and temporal (which in this case also means spatial) journeys, since every journey has a spiritual dimension (witness the pilgrimages to Niagara Falls or to the Capitol). The purpose of the present discussion may be better served by the contrast between the mundane (using the word in its fullest sense) and the marvellous; in which case, the journeys involved in the last chapter were, broadly speaking, mundane, or *dans les mondes connus*, while those which will be considered here are primarily marvellous, hence *dans les mondes inconnus* whether it be among the stars, *l'Iter Extaticum*, or in the depths of the *Mundus Subterraneus*.

These terms are both drawn from *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*[1] which will be the main work discussed in this chapter. It so happens, however, that they also refer to alchemical texts[2], and in addition, they might be appropriately applied to some of Verne's *voyages extraordinaïres*; for example, *De la Terre à la Lune* or *Le Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, and this triple application suggests that there is a link between *Portrait de l'artiste* and two other pieces, namely, Butor's essay on Alchemy and his essay on Jules Verne.

Portrait de l'artiste is ostensibly an autobiography, an account of Butor's youth (the reference to Joyce's *Portrait* is clear), in particular of a few weeks spent in a castle in Franconia, which housed the second greatest private library in Germany. This library was particularly rich in the literature of Alchemy, which Butor read avidly, and which therefore strongly colours the text of the *Portrait*. The castle, on the other hand, had a good deal in common with the "... châteaux â machines et hantises comme celui du roman de Jules Verne", (PA, 21) which are invoked at the beginning of the book, while the novel in question is mentioned explicitly at the end, where it provides the pattern for one of the mysterious games of patience played by the *Comte-Conservateur: Le Château des Karpates*. Both the essays on Verne and on Alchemy are amongst the earliest written by Butor (1949 and 1953 respectively) and both are related to each other as well as to the *Portrait*, as the title of the piece on Verne indicates: "Le point suprême et l'âge d'or à travers quelques oeuvres de Jules Verne", which hints at the wider psychological implications of alchemical terminology. Finally, both the alchemists' and Verne's writing formed an important part of Butor's *lectures d'enfance* and are therefore, on his own evidence, "Lectures qui marquent", hence deserving of study, since in his view, "Fondamentale pour l'étude de tout écrivain, de tout lecteur, donc de nous tous, la constellation des livres de son enfance." (R 3, 260). True to his own dictum, Verne and the literature of Alchemy both feature in *Portrait de l'artiste*. It seemed to me however, that the introduction of the two essays would do much to clarify and complete the references involved, particularly given the biographical slant of this chapter.

Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe appeared in 1967 and seemed to mark a return to a conventional format both physically and conceptually. Its aspect did not differ markedly from that of *n* other books coming out around the same time under the familiar Gallimard imprint and writers as diverse as Gide and Sartre, and more specifically, Joyce and Dylan Thomas had set a precedent for the kind of autobiography heralded by the title. It was widely and favourably reviewed and was in fact hailed by several critics as indicative of Butor's return to the fold of orthodoxy after the aberrations of the last seven years. Robert Kanters' "Il faut saluer le retour vers la littérature de M. Michel Butor,"[3] and Alain Bosquet's more cautious, "Le dernier en date des livres de Michel Butor,... accuse, dans une certaine mesure, un retour aux prestiges de l'écriture:"[4] may be taken as typical. However, Bosquet's caution was warranted, in the event, and a number of disquieting signs, even on the title page of the book, should have put the critics on their guard. Their ready acceptance of the *Portrait* at face value, so to speak, vindicates, to a large extent, Butor's philosophy of *le physique du livre*.

Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe is the most straightforwardly autobiographical text we have from Butor so far, but even so, he remains, in the words of his own description of the god Apollo, "Loxias, c'est-à-dire l'oblique, l'énigmatique." What he has written about Joyce's *Portrait* may be applied to some extent to his own work:

> "Certes, le *Portrait* n'est pas tout à fait une autobiographie, mais plutôt un manifeste inspiré à Joyce par sa propre vie. Il n'a pas écrit *Portrait d'un Artiste*, mais de *l'Artiste*; il donne au dessin qu'il trace une portée plus

> générale. Aussi a-t-il condensé, supprimé ou transformé bien des choses, il n'est pour s'en convaincre que de comparer le texte définitif avec *Stephen Hero*. Mais Joyce prend à son compte toutes les affirmations de son personnage, et ce dernier représentait exactement à ses propres yeux l'image qu'il pouvait offrir dans sa jeunesse à ses amis." (R 1, 196).

It would be true to say that Butor's *Portrait* is not, entirely, nor even perhaps primarily, an autobiography; we have it on his own authority that" "Je n'ai pas écrit ce livre pour raconter ma vie; je raconte ma vie pour parler d'autre chose." Unfortunately we have no text approximating to *Stephen Hero* by which to measure the extent to which Butor has manipulated the *matière première* of his life but the emphasis on *reconstruction méthodique* which is clearly evident in all his work to date indicates that autobiographical data would have undergone the same process. His title retains the *portée plus générale* implicit in the use of the definite article. Again the accuracy of Butor's portrait of himself as a young man must remain, for those who did not know him personally at the time, unconfirmed.

In fact, there are several indications that the fictional element in *Portrait de l'artiste* is a much more important factor than in Joyce's *Portrait*. The interplay between fact and fiction on which I commented in connection with the works in *Romanesque 2* is also present here and exploited even more fully, perhaps, in that after a while the reader is no longer at all sure about which is which. Indeed Butor challenges the *limier futur* in an important passage on page 60, which deserves to be quoted in full:

> "J'ai beaucoup rêvé pendant ce séjour;
> mais se les événements de la veille peuvent
> toujours un jour ou l'autre, même ceux que
> l'on croyait les plus secrets, être vérifiés
> par quelque chercheur, grace à mille ruses,
> mille détours et patiences
> - ainsi que d'erreurs, d'oublis, que de
> gauchissements, un limier futur pourrait
> relever dans ces quelques pages! -,
> par contre il n'y a pour l'instant nul
> moyen de s'assurer qu'un homme a effectivement
> rêvé telle nuit ce qu'il vous dit y avoir
> rêvé, s'il ne l'a noté le lendemain même
> au réveil,
> nul moyen de déceler dans le récit d'un
> rêve le mensonge ou l'erreur;"

Hence, he decides, rather than attempting the impossible task of trying to recall his dreams of so long ago, to "délibérément les construire, rêvant méthodiquement à ces rêves d'antan dissous." The reader is warned therefore, that every second chapter of the fifteen which make up the part of the work entitled, "Le Saint-Empire" is "pure" fiction, since it recounts a dream. Yet Butor's disarming frankness should perhaps be regarded with some suspicion. It may well be intended to convince the reader that those parts of the text which are printed in Roman are factually accurate, by implication, whereas there is really no evidence that this is so. The only established facts are that Butor visited Germany in 1950 during a period of considerable personal upheaval and that he visited Egypt soon after, an experience which marked him profoundly.

As an example of false information, there is the comment Butor offers on the subject of his surname, which he attributes to the Hungarian origins of his family. According to Georges Raillard, who is probably one of the *Georges* to whom the *Portrait* is dedicated, "Le patronyme - Butor - ne renvoie à aucune origine hongroise" (*Butor*, 13). Given the spirit of the book, Butor's intentions may be mischievous, but the clever illusion by which an avowed fiction is used as a support for "fact" which in turn may be fiction has important implications for our approach to literature.

It seems to me that there is probably very little more autobiographical content in *Portrait de l'artiste* than in any of Butor's other books. There may even be less than in *Passage de Milan*, say. Therefore, while one is justified in making the same kind of deductions about Butor the *artist*, as a result of a study of the *Portrait* as one would after reading any other of his works, one is not really in a position to reach any conclusions about him as a man except in so far as he reveals his *métaphysique* by his *technique*. When, therefore, I attribute various thoughts and feelings to Butor in the course of this particular study, this does not necessarily mean that I believe them to be characteristic of Michel Butor as a person, but rather of Michel Butor as the central character of *Portrait de l'artiste*, who may or may not closely resemble him. It does not really matter, since the artist is revealed as clearly in his handling of this *personnage* as of any other, since, like them, it is "un ensemble de mots".

Butor's handling of dream and reality in the *Portrait* is remarkably similar to the method which he ascribes to Jules Verne. Commenting on Verne's treatment of *des mondes connus et inconnus*, he writes:

> "... quelle est cette manière de mêler les deux domaines, de passer si insensiblement de l'un à l'autre que l'on ne peut plus savoir où se trouve la limite entre l'imaginé et l'appris? Le rêve accompagne et suit la description la plus positive sans que la moindre faille se produise entre eux deux." (R 1, 133).

Arguably, Butor's concern with *vraisemblance* is as great, at least as far as the *Portrait* is concerned, as was Verne's, and it seems to me that his handling of the passage from the real to the imaginary rests on basically the same premise, which Butor enunciates thus: "Le réel n'est qu'une sorte d'assomption de l'imaginaire. L'homme se trouve en accord profond avec les choses, qui esquissent les inventions des hommes." (R 1, 133). Nature anticipates fiction as well as the advance of science, he argues. Man realises Nature's dreams, but only by degrees and almost by chance because "Le monde, à la fois dans sa totalité et dans ses détails, est un chiffre." (P. 134). Both the idea of communion with nature and the cryptic quality of the world are closely related to the thought of the alchemists, and I would suggest that where Verne used the positive science of the nineteenth century to *étayer son rêve*, Butor uses alchemy. It is the kind of idea that appeals to him, since it involves the use of a "science" which is now dismissed as having little foundation in fact to validate a fiction. But as the *Portrait* shows, the powers of integration of alchemy were nonetheless greater than nineteenth century science, for all its positivism, because it takes account of the world as cosmos, just as the works of Verne and Butor attempt to do.

As to whether *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe* can be described as a *manifeste*, on first examination, the term would seem to sit rather ill on a work sub-titled *capriccio*, but it might be best to reserve judgment on this point until the analysis of the work is completed.

Why *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*? Butor provides an explanation on the inside of the cover, to the effect that underlying the homage to Joyce and Thomas in the title:

> "... on reconnaîtra la représentation médiévale de cette éminente espèce d'artiste qu'était l'alchimiste comme 'singe de Nature'; la lecture en développera peu à peu d'autres aspects."

Although this information is helpful, it is not without ambiguity. The use of the grammatical form "on reconnaîtra" withdraws Butor's explicit corroboration from what is recognised, at the same time that it posits it. Arguably too, even cultivated readers might fail to make the connection between the monkey and the Alchemist, in which case the "on reconnaîtra" like Butor's rather too frequently used "on sait" either brings home to the reader his ignorance, or else confirms him in his conceit at having already got the allusion. In either case the locution is mildly irritating. A more important ambiguity resides, however, in the phrase *singe de Nature*, which critics, in commenting on the work, have frequently misquoted as *singe de la nature*.[5] That this error is significant is corroborated by Butor's meticulous treatment of the use of the article in Joyce's title. If he himself writes *singe de Nature*, therefore, that is what he means, and the article is omitted deliberately. As it stands, the phrase suggests that artist and alchemist are not only imitators *of* nature but also imitators *by* nature, with all the overtones of malice, parody and a certain naïveté inherent in the activity described in English as "aping" someone or something. The insertion of the article destroys that nuance.

The choice of a monkey as the incarnation of the young artist is ironical in intent and may be interpreted as Butor's riposte to the critics' assessment of the work of the previous seven years as so many *singeries*. This of course in no way invalidates the connection with Alchemy, nor with the Egyptian god of writing, Thoth, pictured as a baboon, to whom reference is also made in the *Portrait*. It merely adds another perspective, which, as Butor suggested, will be developed as a reading of the work proceeds. This perspective, that is to say, the humorous or ironical one, is also hinted at in the sub-title of the book, *capriccio*. Together with the simian presence in the title, it constitutes one of the disquieting signs which ought to have put critics on their guard, as I remarked above. This term is used in music to denote "un morceau instrumental de forme libre, de caractère folklorique." In literature it suggests a piece in which the fantasy of the writer is given free rein and the conventions associated with genre are set aside. For example, Hoffmann's *Princesse Brimbilla* has been described as:

> *"... au sens le plus fort, un capriccio, c'est-à-dire une harmonieuse et homogène association d'un récit réaliste, d'un mythe et d'une*

> *transposition littéralement capricieuse en langage de carnaval, c'est-à-dire de suprême déraison et d'anti-raison, du message qui ne prend toute sa signification que s'il se masque d'images insensées, posées sur lui comme la grille d'un cryptogramme.*"[6]

This meticulous definition, appropriate as it is to *Portrait de l'artiste*, does not, perhaps, sufficiently bring out the whimsical element present in *capriccio*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *caprice*, for example, as a "work of sportive fancy, in art etc.", which gets the idea across better. The etymology it provides is also interesting, since it traces the word to the Italian *capriccio*, meaning sudden start, originally 'horror', the modern sense being derived from *capra* goat. Now, there is a Gothic, or 'horror' element in the *Portrait* but as well as that, Butor has used a rather curious expression while speaking about the autobiographical aspect of the book: "la forme autobiographique", he said, "est prise un peu par les cornes, si vous voulez, dans ce petit ouvrage."[7]

These hints, on the very cover of the book, are straws in the wind, and a failure to take Butor's irony into account in considering the *Portrait* is to miss an important dimension of the work. The critic cannot avoid the *orgie de déchiffrage* (the phrase is used by Butor to describe his own activity in the Count's library) but he can indulge in it in this instance with a certain ironical self-awareness, acknowledging that Butor is inviting him to share in a gentle joke against all scribes, artists and critics alike, *singes de Nature.*

It may be, however, that one of the most delicious ironies attaching to *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe* may not have been consciously intended by Butor at all. I refer to the almost universal reception of the book as a return to the *idée consacrée du livre*, whereas in fact, it embodies practically all the typographical and structural innovations introduced by Butor during the previous seven years.[8] Although the margins in the main body of the text are the conventional ones, a great variety of type-faces is used, including cursive script and Gothic lettering, these two alternating in the chapter headings, throughout the book, after the *Prélude*, and sophisticated use is made of the *blanc*. The text is for the most part disposed in *versets*, somewhat reminiscent of *Degrés* except that in the *Portrait* the sentences tend to be most uncharacteristically short. The list is a device which features just as prominently here as in *Mobile*; on this occasion it is minerals which are enumerated, a choice which has its basis in the remarkable collection housed in the *salle aux mineraux* at the château—but which is also intimately connected with the theme of alchemy. There is the familiar inter-weaving of texts so that various *trajets de lecture* may be pursued. The following rather long quotation illustrates these last two features particularly well:

> "[Le comte] (faisait tourner dans la lumière
> cassitérites bec d'étain, enstatites vert
> sombre, les reposait dans des cases de carton
> sur des tables
>
> - fluorines cubiques, uvarovites vert émeraude,
> diaspores nacrés -
>
> avec de petites étiquettes où les noms étaient
> inscrits à la main:
>
> grossulaires, hornblendes noires, turquoises de
> Nishapour, éléolites troubles,
>
> mais de quelle main, en quel temps, en quelle
> langue?)
>
> - idocrases groseille et jaune, jaspes verts;
> des noms volent pour moi
>
> - spinelles en octaèdres accolés, feldspaths en
> macle de Carlsbad, kieselguhrs -
>
> comme des papillons nocturnes
>
> - lépidocrocites mica rubis, couronnes de rutile,
> gypses queue d'aronde, moroxites vert bleuâtre -
>
> sur ces petits cailloux ternis." (P. 98).

This text also illustrates two further distinguishing characteristics of the *Portrait*, that is the frequent use of parentheses and of dashes. The highly esoteric quality of the material enumerated renders the passage at once opaque, even for French readers, one assumes, and intensely poetic (Butor is careful to note the colour and shape of most of the minerals). His use here of a specialised vocabulary recalls his remarks on the subject of the vocabulary in *6,810,000* to Charbonnier. Speaking of the choice of words one makes in order to express oneself, he points out that:

> "On peut avoir des constitutions systématiques de vocabulaire
>
> . . . .
>
> D'ailleurs, chacun de nous ne connaît qu'une partie du vocabulaire français, il suffit de regarder, de feuilleter le dictionnaire Larousse, je ne parle même pas du Littré, il suffit de feuilleter un petit Larousse pour s'apercevoir du nombre des mots que nous n'avons jamais vus, que nous n'avons jamais entendus, et on peut dire que chacun de nous peut être défini par son vocabulaire." (Entretiens, 146-7).

The vocabulary of mineralogy is cleverly used in the passage above so that the words, which represent pebbles, form a brilliant mosaic. The reader will recall my remarks regarding *Description de San Marco*. And if, pursuing one particular *trajet* we read:

> "des noms volent pour moi
> . . . .
> comme des papillons nocturnes
> . . . .
> sur ces petits cailloux ternis.",

the discussion as to whether words can be treated like *cailloux* comes to mind.

It should be noted that it is the words here which, for Butor, add lustre to the objects they describe. It is the riches of language which are being vaunted, under the guise of a rock collection, and the implication is that the list itself is more dazzling to the imagination than are the pebbles to the eye. This page from the *Portrait*, written almost entirely in a vocabulary foreign to all but mineralogists, in which words are treated literally and metaphorically as pieces of stone in the hands of a mosaicist, drew not one protest, that I am aware of, from the critics. That in itself is sufficient irony, even if Butor's own intentions were not explicitly ironical in this instance; although I am inclined to think that they were.

Speaking of *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*, Butor himself has said that: "... c'est un livre ironique, rusé. Je m'y suis amusé." I have attempted in this introduction to illustrate that aspect of the book, which must be taken into account if one is to savour it fully. The *cryptogramme* has always fascinated Butor (it is also an important feature of Jules Verne's world, and, of course, of Alchemy) and in the *Portrait* he indulges in a certain amount of mischievous mystification. However, the book is sub-titled *capriccio*, and not *divertimento*. Though it has its humorous side, it is also meant to be taken seriously as a work of art, and the autobiography is only the starting point of an investigation which casts its net much wider.

I have quoted Butor as saying that he tells his life-story in order to talk about something else. Anticipating the question "About what?", he replies:

> "Eh bien, pour parler de l'Allemagne bien sûr, pour parler du XVIIIe siecle, pour parler du Saint Empire, de l'alchimie, de l'écriture de l'histoire du monde."[9]

The cryptogram of *Portrait de l'artiste* is not an easy one to decipher. It requires the patience of the alchemist as well as a sense of humour. Perhaps the endless card-games of the Comte are meant to illustrate, among other things, the maxim that "La patience vient à bout de tout". In any case, repeated confrontations gradually reveal that artifice, rather than caprice, dominates in this *capriccio*, which, according to one critic:

> "... a ce tact (des artistes en plein possession de leurs moyens) de faire semblant, au-delà de la gravité et de l'interêt du propos, de n'être plus qu'un jeu."[10]

Indeed the experience of reading *Portrait de l'artiste* duplicates that of observing a complex game, and it is significant that Butor has used this very analogy to describe the uninitiated reader's reaction to the books of the alchemists, hence, by implication, to books generally, but especially perhaps to his own.

> "Pour celui qui assiste à une partie d'échecs sans connaître les règles du jeu, les pièces semblent d'abord être déplacees au hasard. S'il connaît d'autres jeux similaires, les dames par exemple, les joueurs lui apparaîtront comme des enfants qui accumulent méprises sur méprises. Mais s'il continue, il décèlera bientôt des régularités. Il verra que les pièces ont des functions précises, et que les parties se terminent lorsque se produit un événement bien déterminé, vers lequel tout le reste est orienté. Ainsi pour le lecteur de traités d'alchimie: après de nombreuses lectures et confrontations, les symboles majeurs révélaient leurs relations et leurs pouvoirs."[11]
>
> Butor

This statement, which accurately describes our experience with all of Butor's work so far, is especially pertinent, not only to the *Portrait*, but to the two other pieces to which I have related it: the essays on alchemy and Jules Verne. All three are overtly connected with alchemy and it would seem reasonable to expect, on that account, that Butor's description of how to proceed in the reading of alchemical texts would be of particular assistance in deciphering them. The two essays are evidently explicative in nature and therefore do not pose the same problems of interpretation. Indeed I have already enlisted them as aids to an understanding of the *capriccio* rather than as objects of exegesis in themselves. The essay on Verne, in fact, provides an excellent example of what one might call Butor's alchemical method of interpretation in practice. It is a question of elucidating the *règles du jeu* of Verne's work and hence of its orientation, and by revealing Verne's preoccupation with the cryptogram, with man's search for his "element" (Captain Nemo: the sea, Hatteras: fire) and for the *point suprême* (identified with the pole, or the centre of the earth); all concepts closely related to alchemy, Butor indicates how fruitful the application of alchemical symbolism to literature in general, and to man's deepest impulses and desires, can be. This carries the further implication, of course, that the "ordinary" reader must exhibit the same patience and concentration that is required of any would-be initiate into the Royal Art.

The imagery employed by Butor in describing the process by which one interprets a text (for his remarks should not be limited to the writing of the alchemists alone) is interesting. The analogy of the game recalls the many instances of word-play that we have encountered in Butor's own work, and the initial mystification of the reader in the face of what appears to be an artibrary arrangement of elements. The fact that the recognition of the *règles du jeu* which the work obeys must precede interpretation, indicates that literature, like play, has to be structured and disciplined in order to be meaningful. Yet it is also autonomous, in that it can establish its own rules provided that they are adhered to consistently. It should be noted, incidentally, that the observer familiar with the relatively simple game of draughts will initially, according to Butor, dismiss the much more complex moves of chess as nonsensical. This is a delightfully ironic comment on the classical reaction of the public to new and difficult works of art and anticipates Butor's own experience (The essay was written in 1953). But are we to conclude then that literature is only a game?

To do so would appear to be in direct contradiction with Butor's professed belief in the high purpose of art. However, the manner in which the question is phrased may indicate a mistakenly disparaging attitude to the notion of the game and a correspondingly grim conception of art, which Butor, for all his seriousness, manifestly does not share. This is particularly evident in the *Portrait*, though we have encountered several instances of his subtle and rather cerebral humour in the course of examining his other works. It is a puritanical notion that art, if it is to instruct or elevate or transform, must cease to be a source of enjoyment. This is not an argument in favour of facility, but rather the suggestion that, to paraphrase Yeats, the fascination of what's difficult, instead of drying the sap out of one's veins, may become the very source of spontaneous joy, if not of natural content.

The attitude of the surrealists (whose influence on Butor is documented) is relevant to this discussion. In his little book *L'Un dans l'autre*[12] André Breton roundly condemns those who disparage games, at least when played by adults, and outside the sports arena, as "la gluante gent du vous n'avez pas honte à votre age." (P. 8). An examination of the particular importance of games for the Surrealists cannot be undertaken here, but some of Breton's more general remarks are highly pertinent, particularly the following passage in which he comments on Johan Luizinga's *Homo Ludens*:

> "Ces travaux montrent, en effet, que l'existence du jeu, *action libre* par excellence, 'affirme de façon permanente, et au sens le plus elevé, le caractère supralogique de notre situation dans le cosmos'. Ils concluent à la nécessité de 'voir dans la poésie la réalisation humaine d'une exigence ludique au sein de la communauté.' Et le grand historien et penseur néerlandais de préciser: Tout ce qui est reconnu peu à peu dans la poésie comme qualité consciente: beauté, caractère sacré, puissance magique, se trouve impliqué au début dans la qualité primaire du jeu.' Se fermer au jeu, tout au moins au jeu d'imagination comme le prescrit la discipline adulte, c'est, on le voit, saper en soi-même le meilleur de l'homme." (Ibid.)

Phrases such as "le caractère supralogique de notre situation dans le cosmos", "caractère sacré" and "puissance magique" are far removed from the notion of frivolity, in spite of Breton's blunt statement that it was primarily *le divertissement* which he and his brethren sought in their games. Indeed, they are all expressive of ideas associated with alchemy, which is particularly appropriate, and not fortuitous, in this instance. The surrealists too, have been deeply concerned with that ancient art and like Butor, they postulate strong links between the Great Work and the work of art, between the *adepte* and the artist.[13] It is interesting that Butor greatly favours the word *oeuvre* to designate literary productions and also the word *élaborer* to describe the activity of the writer.[14]

The cryptic language, the ritual gestures, the elaborate instruction and the highly imaginative emblemata that characterise alchemy, confer on it, for want of a better word, a certain playful aspect. (The French word, *ludique*, would be more appropriate, but the nearest English equivalent is, significantly, *ludicrous*.) Indeed, it is perhaps on this very count that alchemy has frequently been dismissed as hocus-pocus. But as Butor and many other writers on the subject have been at pains to point out, the alchemists were not simply, nor even perhaps primarily, chemists or metallurgists, but mystics, and it has been suggested that the *Grande Oeuvre* was not so much concerned with the transmutation of metals as with the transmutation of the alchemist's soul.[15] *L'ascèse*, then is not necessarily in contradiction to *le jeu* and this in itself is perhaps a prime example of that resolution of antimonies which is one of the basic premises of alchemy. It provides us too, with a paradigm for the resolution of the apparent contradiction between art as a game and the painful experiences of such figures as Jacques Revel, or Pierre Vernier, or even the *luxueux forçat*, Marcel Proust, from whom such sacrifices were demanded. How can their activity, or the works which it produced, be regarded in any sense as a game? The answer seems to me to lie in an image such as that which opens Bergman's film, *The Seventh Seal*, when the knight is seen playing at chess with Death. In another chapter I have commented at some length on Butor's dictum that "Chaque mot écrit est une victoire contre la mort." A game need not be frivolous; it all depends on the stakes.

The atmosphere of "Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe" is incomparably more light-hearted than that which permeates either *L'Emploi du temps* or *Degrés*. The *motif* of play recurs throughout the book. Apart from the *comte*'s games of patience, there are the games played by his children within Butor's view, as he reads voraciously in the *tour du Prince*, while Butor often amuses himself by playing with the mobile *meurtrières* of the *chemin de ronde*, also the delight of tourists, for whose benefit, "... en été, presque tous les jours, on en faisait jouer quelques-unes." (P. 123).

A more elaborate kind of *jeu* is that of the strange organ stops which are mentioned throughout Butor's dreams, the organ being employed rather in the same way as in the days of silent films, or indeed even nowadays, particularly in "Gothic" movies. For example, on page 178 we read: "A l'orgue un trille d'une quinte soyeuse au jeu de kieselguhr.", and on page 198, "A l'orgue un trille d'une sixte terreuse au jeu d'onyx". These notations will be the subject of further commentary later on. It is sufficient to point out now that reference is made in both of them to minerals and that the general effect is highly suggestive of surrealist poetry.

It seems that there are grounds for saying of the *Portrait*, as Harry Levin has done of *Finnegans Wake*, that "... it is a wonderful game - by no means a private affair, but one in which many may join, each with his own contribution, and the more the merrier." But if this is designed to encourage the impatient reader for whom the complexity of the *Wake* may make it a grim business, Levin is obliged to concede that it may prove equally disturbing for the reader whose conception of art is rather grim. However, in his opinion, such a reader "should realise that all art is a game, the object of which is to make the problems of life and death - with as much insight, skill, and originality as possible - a source of enjoyment."[16] It would be fair to to say that this describes Butor's activity in *Portrait de l'artiste*. However, his strong didactic impulse must be kept in mind, as well as the fact that the book is set in 1950 in Germany and that the count's castle cannot have been far from Dachau. The book, like alchemy itself, has its sinister side. The favourite game of the children is *la chasse à la sorcière* and the toy Butor plays with is a *meurtrière*.[17]

This ambiguity, which permeates the "symboles majeurs" of *Portrait de l'artiste* and hence determines "leurs relations et leurs pouvoirs", is also characteristic of the *génie du lieu* of the book's setting, Southern Germany, which finds its most concentrated expression in the predominating architectural style of the region: the rococo. According to one authority, a basic rule of the rococo was "to produce artificially a counterplay within the forms of reality", so that the effect produced was one of irony, "which is ultimately nothing but the result of the artist playing with the possibilities of art." Furthermore:

> "The capriccio is a characteristic art form of the rococo. Genetically it can be explained as the continuation of the earlier grotesque... In this sense the capriccio is the ornamentalisation of the content. The ambivalence of the content, its multiple possibilities of meaning are analogous to the micromegalithic structure of the *rocaille*. Like the *rocaille* the capriccio continually changes meaning. This indecision as an artistic principle and the resulting interplay is a characteristic feature of the rococo."[18]

An examination of the *symboles majeurs* of *Portrait de l'artiste* and their relationships, confirms the relevance of these remarks to the book.

Of Butor's other works it is perhaps to *Le Génie du lieu (I)* that the *Portrait* is closest; not simply because they are both autobiographical, but because the latter, as well as being a *Portrait de l'artiste* is also a portrait of the *genius loci,* in this case, the tutelary deity of Southern Germany. Butor's visit took place in 1950[19] but it is not the Germany of the fifties that we encounter directly in his book. As he himself said, he wrote the *Portrait* "... pour parler de l'Allemagne bien sûr, *pour parler du XVIIIe siecle, pour parler du Saint Empire,*". A passage on page 105 of the book provides a possible explanation for this historical orientation.

On the occasion of his first visit to the library, in the company of the count, Butor is not paying attention when the burglar alarm system is being explained to him, so dazzled is he by the "salle entière d'incunabules" among other riches. When he returns the next day, therefore, alone, he neglects to press the *interrupteur* which silences the mechanism, and he has not been reading long when a buzzing does not quite succeed[20] in obtruding itself on his consciousness, rising gradually to a pandemonium which brings the guard and several of the villagers rushing to the spot. The guard shuts off the alarm, but after that, Butor writes:

> "... je savais que le silence de la cellule était comme un fragile pont bâti sur un gouffre de hurlement. Ce château tout entier était une bulle de temps passé, miraculeusement épargné par les flammes, une île dans le temps, aux rives, aux enceintes battues par les marées, les laves d'aujourd'hui, une île qui avait recueilli tous ces rescapés d'une autre région du Saint-Empire, d'une autre bulle de temps passé qui, elle, avait expiré sous la fureur." (P. 105).

This passage is deserving of close analysis for the light it throws on *Portrait de l'artiste* as a whole and because it is an example of Butor's writing at its very best, revealing him in the full glow of his maturity.

In the first place, it reveals the most obvious reason for Butor's preoccupation with the Germany of the past. The castle is *une bulle de temps passé* housing *tous ces rescapés ... d'une autre bulle de temps passé.* This anachronistic quality must obviously, therefore, be an attribute of the *genius loci.* The Holy Roman Empire existed from 992 until it was dissolved by Napoleon in 1806, when it had lost most of its meaning, which, in any case, had always been somewhat equivocal. (It has been described in a well-known aphorism as having been neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire.) The castle was built sometime during the period between the tenth and early nineteenth centuries; indeed it would appear from internal evidence that different parts of it were constructed at different times, since the moat, port-cullis and *chemin de ronde* suggest a medieval *château-fort*, whereas the library is housed in a "grand bâtiment Renaissance". Then again, the *cellules minuscules* of *la tour des supplices* are likened to the 'fillettes' of Louis XI, which would date the tower in the fifteenth century.

The predominance of the eighteenth century in the aura of the place, and hence in Butor's book, would seem to derive partly from the fact that of the 140,000 volumes in the library, "... la plus grande partie provient du dix-huitième siècle français." (P. 76)[21] In addition, a number of other collections housed in the castle date from the same period, notably the rock collection and perhaps too the collection of engravings, which is housed in "la salle des Cavaliers ... vaste salle dix-huitième." (P. 100). The Princes von O. W., not having much to occupy them at that time, were all, according to the count, "d'enragés collectionneurs". But perhaps the most important reason for the emphasis on the eighteenth century is to be found in the following remarks by Lord Clark:

> "By the year 1700 the German-speaking countries have once more become articulate. For over a century the disorderly aftermath of the

> Reformation, followed by the dreary, interminable horrors of the Thirty Years' War, had kept them from playing a part in the history of civilisation. Then peace, stability, the natural strength of the land, and a peculiar social organisation, allowed them to add to the sum of European experience two shining achievements, one in music, the other in architecture."[22]

The name Baroque has come to be applied to the music as well as to the architecture and Butor's interest in the style as well as in both of these arts is documented.[23]

The *Salle des Chevaliers* is described as *la plus ornée* of the castle and during his seven weeks, Butor visits several other delicious residences in the region, notably the palace of an arch-bishop which bears a marked resemblance to the *Residenz* at Wurzburg, where, according to Lord Clark, the terms Rococo and Baroque overlap.[24] Indeed the majority of the interiors described in the *Portrait*, and they are quite numerous, are eighteenth century, although the *architecture* of the castle of the von O. W. family seems to be predominantly medieval.[25] It is significant that Butor has said of the *Portrait* that he wished to "... faire une composition dans le style allemand du XVIIIe siecle avec tout ce qui y reste de mediéval et exprimer ainsi notre relation profonde au Moyen Age."[26] The musical overtones of the phrase, *faire une composition*, should be noted, an effect which is heightened when it is taken in conjunction with the subtitle *capriccio.* As to what remains of the Middle Ages in eighteenth-century Germany, here is another quotation from Lord Clark:

> "Baroque elaboration is not the side of Bach we value most. That severe head belongs equally to the Renaissance or the late Middle Ages; take away the wig and it could easily come out of Durer, or even a Riemenschneider. And some of the great moments in Bach's oratorios of the Passion have the solemn simplicity and deep religious feeling of Giotto's frescoes. The towering polyphone has the quality of Gothic architecture. But then we remember how closely German Baroque, in its use of controlled space to work on our emotions, follows the traditions of Gothic architecture; and we find that we can illustrate Bach's music by a contemporary building."[27]

The Gothic quality Lord Clark discerns in German Baroque may have its counterpart in the "Gothic" element in *Portrait de l'artiste* in the sense in which the word might be applied to Edgar Allan Poe's stories or to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* The contradiction which is basic to the term *Gothic* is highly relevant to Butor's book, the central theme of which is perhaps just such a clash of opposites as exists between the glory of the great Gothic cathedrals and the barbarism which the word originally connoted. Thus the vita beata of the scholar in the count's eighteenth century library can be rudely shattered by a burglar alarm that recalls the sirens of war. The castle may be "une bulle de temps passé", but as Butor observes, "... la paroi irisée était si mince." (P. 105).

These reflections do not exhaust the possibilities of the expression "bulle de temps passé", however. The word *bulle* occurs several times in the course of the *Portrait*. Apart from the two instances mentioned above, it appears very early on in connection with a film about Hungary seen by Butor, called *Chevaux de la Puszta*, in which the birth of a foal was shown, and he remarks on "(cette énorme bulle dont le poulain se dégageait avec peine, ces jambes tremblantes sur lesquelles il essayait de se tenir)" (P. 22). The word occurs again on page 124 to describe the *échantillons circulaires* of landscape which Butor was able to seize by manipulating the *meurtrières*, *échantillons* which are *des bulles d'air allemand*. And it takes on a sinister connotation on page 198, when it appears in the phrase *des bulles noires horribles*, describing an incident in one of Butor's dreams. It is evident, then, that its significance in the passage under discussion goes deeper than verbal felicity.

In a great number of the paintings of alchemists, a sphere is represented as a symbol of the Pythagorean insistence on the importance of number and form in the

Cosmos.[28] But in a painting by David Teniers the Younger (who has been described as "alchemy's artist par excellence"), representing Alchemical Cupids, a large iridescent soap-bubble hovers in the air above three cupids, two of whom, representing the alchemist and his famulus, are busy at the hearth in the background, while another fills a purse with gold coins in the foreground.[29] As Butor has remarked, "L'Alchimie ... caractérise justement la pensée mediévale."[30] But in the same sense cupids characterise the architecture, or at least the interiors, of Southern Germany. It would be difficult to imagine a more apt pictorial representation of the connection between the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century posited by Butor than the Alchemical Cupids. In the light of his rich culture, his deep interest in painting, and what we have learned about the *minutie* of his method, it is not at all fanciful to suppose that Teniers' picture was a factor in the choice of the expression *bulle de temps*, although it was probably strongly influenced too by related considerations closely linked with alchemy.

In "L'Alchimie et son langage", Butor wrote:

> "A bien des égards l'alchimiste ancien est déjà un archéologue mental; il s'efforce de s'arracher à son temps pour récuperer une forme de conscience en accord avec les caractéristiques de l'oeuvre." (R 1, 15).

Mutatis mutandis, this sentence could be applied to Butor's activity in the *Portrait*. Mircea Eliade opens a slightly different perspective on the link between the work of the alchemist and time, however, when he says that the alchemists, like all the "masters of fire", "by aiding the work of Nature, accelerated the tempo of things, and in the final instance," were substitutes for time itself." And again: "the essential point is that their work, transmutation, involved, in one form or another, the elimination of time:"[31] the elimination of Time, one of man's abiding dreams, bridging the gap between *A la recherche du temps perdu* and science fiction. Butor has described Proust's great novel as affecting a global transmutation: "un livre ouvert dans lequel le monde entier doit pouvoir se voir... se changer... et se voir changer," instigator of "le seul véritable voyage, le seul bain de Jouvence," so that, "la fameuse chambre tapissée de liège est ainsi la réalisation de l'obus capitonné de Jules Verne." (R 2, 292). Perhaps the same might be said of Butor's own *bulle de temps passé*. In any case, the sphere, the bubble, the cork-lined room and the upholstered shell are all analogous to the alchemist's Vase of Hermes (whence the expression "hermetically sealed") in which the final *conjunctio*, the culmination of the Great Work, takes place, resulting in the Philosopher's Stone.

"Je savais que le silence de la cellule était comme un fragile pont bâti sur un gouffre de hurlement." The Dantesque resonance of this sentence cannot be mistaken, and the reference is taken up again on the next page, when Butor exclaims:

> " - O père Athanase Kircher, tu fus véritablement mon Virgile dans l'exploration de ce monde englouti!"

The precision with which the image fits the situation it describes is admirable; the perfect marriage of allusion and reality. One speaks in French of "un bruit *infernal*" and in English, uproar is often described as "all Hell breaking loose." The Inferno is evoked again when we are told that the castle has been "miraculeusement épargné par les flammes" and here, of course, the reference is to World War 2, of all wars the one in which the greatest numbers perished by fire and during which the horror of what has come to be known as The Holocaust, was perpetrated. This reference is reinforced by the presence, within the confines of the *bulle de temps passé*, which is the castle, of the survivors of another such *bulle*, "qui, elle, avait expiré sous la fureur": the count and his family together with a number of his retainers, who are all refugees from the Sudetenland, as a consequence of the decision taken at the Potsdam Conference to transfer the entire German-speaking population of the area to Germany.[32]

It is remarkable how Butor, in this passage, without once referring directly to the Hitler régime, reveals the menacing presence of the Third *Reich* behind the *Saint-Empire*, which, in name at least, would appear to be its antithesis. However, various pieces of information, spread throughout the book, show that the *Saint-Empire*, so-called, had its dark side too, symbolised in the castle itself by:

> "la tour des supplices: oubliettes et surtout cellules minuscules, dans lesquelles on ne pouvait ni se mettre debout ni s'étendre (comme dans les 'fillettes' de notre Louis XI), avec judas pour confessions et poêles pour faciliter les aveux." (P. 100),

fore-runners of the refinements of Dachau and Auschwitz. The brutality and superstition which gave rise to rituals such as *la chasse à la sorcière*, and against which the writers of the Enlightenment represented in the count's library had fought so valiantly, was destined to break out again with undiminished fury in the twentieth century. By a cunning reversal, or a brilliant sleight-of-hand, the Third *Reich* is presented as a sub-stratum of the *Saint-Empire*, which in reality, foreshadowed it. How fragile indeed is "le silence de la cellule", how vulnerable the *paroi irisé* of civilisation before the onslaught of the barbarians.

Thus while it is true that Butor is concerned with the Germany of the eighteenth century and the *Saint-Empire* in *Portrait de l'artiste*, this does not represent a retreat from the reality of Post-War Germany. The few sentences I have examined may be taken as typical of the masterly way in which he deals with the Third *Reich*, still a searing reality in European minds in 1950. His reticence at first seems to strike a false note. The riches of the library, the architectural exuberance of the region, the esoterica of alchemy, perhaps even an infatuation with the countess, tend to dominate during a first reading of the *Portrait*. Although one would not have expected anything like a political tract, this seems oddly frivolous on Butor's part, nonetheless. (This niggling dissatisfaction, however, is in the nature of an after-thought; it does not obtrude on the delight one takes in an initial reading.) But all our experience of Butor's work so far has shown that a single reading is not only inadequate but may even by misleading. How much more so, then, in the case of a book which he himself has described as *rusé*. Claude Mauriac has stated the problem nicely when he says:

> "On n'en epuisera pas le sens en une seule lecture, si une seule lecture suffira a en rendre sensible les charmes."[33]

Although at first the half-dozen or so references to World War 2 and to Nazism seem so incidental as almost to pass unnoticed, one comes to realise that like the bell which tolls intermittently throughout the *Portrait*, they are rendered even more ominous by being infrequent and muffled. On closer acquaintance, it becomes evident that as well as being Butor's portrait, this book is also his *Désastres de la Guerre*, a theme first treated, significantly, by another Frenchman, Jacques Callot,[34] who appears in the book and in a context which highlights that clash of opposites which this entire discussion is intended to demonstrate:

> "*Les Désastres de la Guerre* de Jacques Callot et d'anciens plans de villes allemandes dans la salle des Chevaliers, de retour au chapitre sur le paradis:
>
> "Le monde igné et ténébreux se délectait dans le monde sacré de la lumière et celui-ci dans le monde extérieur qui en était la manifestation...",
>
> les rayons de la rhétorique et de la musique." (P. 188).

Finally, it should be noted that the elements which go to make up the short passage which elicited this commentary, are all baroque, in the sense in which Jean Rousset [35] applies the term to literature. It is worth quoting it again, I think, in order to see it from this angle:

> "Après cela, je savais que le silence de la cellule était comme un fragile pont bâti sur un gouffre de hurlement. Ce château tout entier était une bulle de temps passé, miraculeusement epargné par les flammes, une île dans le temps, aux rives, aux enceintes battues par les marées, les laves d'aujourd'hui, une île qui avait recueilli tous ces rescapés d'une autre région du Saint-Empire, d'une autre bulle de temps passé qui, elle, avait expiré sous la fureur."

The *fragile pont, bulle, flammes, île* menaced by waves of water and lava, are all characteristic of the baroque idea whether we take it as style or *weltanschauung*. Evanescence, destruction, the contagion of fire, sweeping movement, these themes are all present in Butor's few sentences and what is more they are represented by the same imagery employed by the poets whom Rousset designates as baroque.[36] (Curiously, one of the illustrations in his book shows two prints by Parigi; the first, *L'île de la magicienne Alcine*, the second, *La même île envahie par les flammes.*)

This short paragraph is a splendid example of Butor's mature style, richly allusive but not self-consciously erudite, deeply poetic, not as a result of rigorous form only, but of the perfect marriage of form and content, lyrical but with no hint of the purple patch, an example of a wholly successful *conjunctio* between literature and the visual arts. It might serve as a scale model of *Portrait de l'artiste* as a whole, which exemplifies the same qualities in macrocosm; as a *capriccio*, evoking the *génie du lieu* of a country where violence and destructive influences co-exist with gaiety, philosophy and a robust joy in living. Like the *Residenz* at Wurzburg, *Portrait de l'artiste* combines the power of the baroque with the frivolity of the rococo. That ambivalence and the constantly changing forms which alike characterise both styles are also dominant features in Butor's book, of which the central theme (announced in the title), is metamorphosis: the phenomenon which marks the ultimate limit to which these procedures can be carried.

"Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes."

Ovid, Metamorphoses, VIII, 18[37]

The epigraph to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* tells us that Daedalus abandoned his mind to obscure arts; in Ovid's poem, the line opens the story of Daedalus and Icarus. The fact that metamorphosis is one of the major themes in *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe* suggests a delicate homage to the Irish artificer. I suppose that the concept of changing forms seemed to provide an appropriate analogy, in both instances, for the emerging consciousness of the young artist in all its plasticity. Butor, however, embroiders the theme more lavishly than Joyce. In doing so, he is not merely gilding the lily, but making an acute observation about the ambiance in which he underwent the first state at least in the transformation from larva to imago.[38] Metamorphosis is not only an important feature of the baroque and rococo styles which dominate in Southern Germany. It is also a theme frequently treated in the fantastic tales of which those of Hoffmann, Tieck and Novalis are exemplary; artists who were probably no less architects of the young Butor's Germany than were Balthazar Neumann or the Zimmermann brothers. Finally, metamorphosis is the very touchstone of alchemy, the *ars ignota* which is central to Butor's book.

Metamorphosis makes such frequent appearances, and in so many forms (a typical sort of Butor joke) that it would be impossible to comment on all of them in a study of this length. I will single out the references which seem to me to be of the most interest.

As early as page 40 the alchemical transmutation is brought to our attention. Describing the atmosphere of the post-war years in Paris, Butor says: "C'était le printemps, la disette, l'âge de plomb;", but in contrast to this scarcity, there were the intellectual reunions which he was attending at this time in the château de la Fortrelle[39]; "Théléme de pauvreté, au milieu de somptueux abres, avec les chuchotements de la guerre, le règne de Saturne changé en siècle d'or." Lead is the metal attributed to Saturn, and it is a paradox typical of alchemy that this dull and heavy material may be transmuted into gold. The age of Iron or Mars (symbolised in the *Portrait* by the German Iron Cross[40]) is past, and out of its charred residue, Butor seems to suggest, the spirit of man may yet rise again, triumphant, like the phoenix, which was, incidentally one of the symbols for the Philosopher's Stone. The stone, of course, was not a stone at all, but a red powder, and great importance attached to colour and colour changes in alchemical thought. In the Great Work, four principal colours were said to make their successive appearance in the order black, white, citrine and red. Colour plays a very important part in *Portrait de l'artiste*, witness the rock collection already described; the emphasis throughout the book on the colour of eyes is another example.

The personal metamorphosis which the sojourn in Germany will initiate for Butor is first hinted at in a short sentence isolated by two *blancs* on page 56: "J'ai dû changer à Augsbourg". There is a pun involved here on the idea of changing trains. In his dreams, he assumes first of all the role of a *forestier* and is subsequently transformed into a monkey by a vampire, whose wrath he has incurred for making love to a certain *belle étudiante*, the vampire's imprisoned mistress. The spell is finally broken through the agency of another beautiful student, at tremendous cost to herself, since she ends up as a little heap of ashes after having undergone a dazzling series of self-induced metamorphoses in the course of her struggle with the author of Butor's misfortune.

Metamorphosis is a theme which is frequently treated in the classics; Ovid's work is a case in point and it too appears in the *Portrait*, neatly tied in with the distinctive architecture, or at least interior decoration, of Franconia, and with the themes of alchemy and the artist as *singe*. The occasion is that of a visit paid by Butor and the count to the neighbouring former archbishop's residence (modelled perhaps on Wurzburg, as I have already suggested), now occupied by a "comtesse heritière, d'origine italienne, très poudrée" about whom "(on se chuchotait qu'elle ne savait rien refuser à son aumonier)," "l'abbé guilleret" who acted as guide to the visitors, showing them among other wonders:

> "... le salon des dieux de l'Olympe:
>
> "Vous reconnaissez Diane avec son arc et son croissant, Mars avec son casque, Mercure avec ses ailes et son caducée, mais voici quelque chose de plus curieux, cette envolée d'un taureau, d'un aigle, d'un cygne et d'une pluie d'or, c'est Jupiter dans quelques-unes de ses métamorphoses amoureuses, vous les avez au grand complet dans les caissons de la galerie supérieure de l'escalier monumental; et ici, d'autres métamorphoses, alors que Jupiter se transforme lui-même pour son plaisir, les malheureux que vous voyez sont tous transformés par quelque dieu qui se venge ou les punit, Actéon en cerf, par exemple',
>
> la salle des *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide, la galerie des portraits:" (P. 163)[41]

This recital has a great deal in common with the following lines from Ben Johnson's *The Alchemist*, in which the connection between classical myth and the Great Work is brought out:

> "And they are gathered into Jason's helm,
> (The alembic), and then sowed in Mars his field,
> And thence sublimed so often, till they're fixed.
> Both this, th'Hesperian garden, Cadmus' story,
> Jove's shower, the boon of Midas, Argus' eyes,
> Bocace his Demogorgon, thousands more,
> All abstract riddles of our stone."[42]

In the portrait gallery, Butor and the count view a picture of an alchemist and pass on to the *cabinet des singes*, where artists of all kinds are depicted as monkeys, "'- une métamorphose à laquelle les dieux de l'Olympe, semble-t-il, n'avaient pas songé-'" as the *abbé* points out. Not so Scheherezade, however, witness the Second Calendar's tale,[43] which Butor begins to read when they go up to the library and which meanders through the *Portrait* from that point to the end, providing a precedent for Butor's dreams, in which he is transmogrified into a monkey who is a talented scribe.

The chapter dealing with the archiepiscopal palace must rank among the most successful of Butor's evocations of buildings. It is an exquisite miniature of *Description de San Marco*,[44] due allowance having been made for differences in period and style. Here Baroque and Rococo merge, and surge through the pages in an almost over-powering wave of light and beauty. No wonder Butor thinks he is dreaming when he looks out through the French windows (an essential feature of the rococo interior because of the light they let in to the rooms from below) at the deer grazing in the park. He is lunching in:

> "... la salle à manger decorée de grandes natures mortes de Jordaens et Snyders sous lesquelles on avait disposé en écho des porcelaines de Saxe représentant les fruits, légumes oû animaux qui y étaient figurés." (P. 162).

But the exuberance of the chapter is not gratuitous. Its swelling progress incorporates most of the major themes of the *Portrait* in its flux. Some of these I have already commented on, but there are others which must be dealt with, if perforce briefly.

The visit takes place on "quelque vendredi", the day named after Venus.[45] As might be expected, therefore, there is an erotic undertone to the chapter. This is manifested in several ways, ranging from Butor's sensual feeling of communion with nature:

> "toute terre m'apparaissait susceptible de cuissons, toute herbe gorgée de précieux sucs, tout reptile porteur de puissants vénins, tout rocher devait receler des fissures entrouvables par quelque Sésame, tout torrent rouler des pépites, sinon d'or - que m'importait l'or? - mais de plus généreuses substances ... propres à favoriser, dans les plus simples athanors, la distillation d'elixirs d'immortalité." (P.153),

with its richly multivalent imagery, to the recipes from the little book *L'Art d'être heureux par les rêves:* "... à base de chrysocolle, amanite ou vanesse, pour retrouver la nuit une amante disparue." (P. 167). The relationship which is hinted at between the *comtesse* and her *abbé guilleret* is an example of that variation of the couple referred to in *6,810,000* as "vielle peau et gigolo".[46] Venus is mentioned by name in a quotation from *Basile Valentin*, a reputed monk of the fifteenth century, author of a celebrated series of alchemical publications:

> "'Quand la noble Venus est dans son gouvernement, et, suivant la coûtume, distribue justement les offices de la cour royale, elle apparaît de grande splendeur, et pour elle la Musique présente un magnifique étendard rouge sur lequel est peinte la charité, très belle avec des vêtements verts'," (P. 167).

The décor, too, conjures up the goddess. The loves of Jupiter are depicted twice, as we have seen, but the typically rococo "incrustations de coquillages: praires, palourdes, bénitiers, murex," (P. 158) are more directly evocative of Venus as is the salon des miroirs, "tout en marqueterie et miroirs, plafond de miroirs," (P. 166).

Reading the old édition of the Arabian nights which he finds on a little oval table in the library,[47] Butor indulges in erotic fantasy:

> "'... le Sultan & son épouse se couchèrent Dinarzade...' (et elle avait sur ses chevilles nues qui sortaient de la couverture des anneaux de topazes gouttes d'eau) " (P. 165)

until, "Je vis une ombre passer sur la page, le comte se moquait de moi." A dark shadow invades even this *Mundus Subterraneus* suffused with light, a shadow that deepens as the chapter progresses, with the description of the count's château huddled in darkness, a glimpse of "l'ancienne synagogue, epargnée parce qu'elle était depuis longtemps transformée en grange." (P. 168), and a recital from "le livre du château de H. ... chapitre des exécutions." (P. 169).

The count is presented as a sinister figure from the beginning. When Butor arrives, he is suffering from *une entorse* which causes him to walk with a pronounced limp. This identifies him with Saturn, represented in alchemical art as a man with a wooden leg, or even with the traditionally club-footed devil. However, Jacob too limped after his combat with the angel, as did Vulcan, the husband of Venus. It is quite likely that Butor would have taken all these allusions into account. Indeed, if the suspicion that he fell in love with the countess[48] is correct, then the count's mockery becomes more than the benevolent teasing that the young man's bookishness might have elicited, and indeed the entire sentence I have quoted suggests something which is not benevolent at all: "Je vis une ombre passer sur la page, le comte se moquait de moi." It seems significant that the patience which forms the transition from that particular *vendredi* to the night is *Le Château des Karpates*, which ends with a somewhat sinister marriage procession, and while he is resolving it, the count gives a rather disagreeable rendering of "l'air d'*Orlando*:

> "'Inamorata, mio cuore tremante,
> Voglio morire...',
> et il inventait sur les paroles italiennes de Jules Verne un air haendelien qu'il susurrait en fausset." (P. 170).

Finally, the *Mundus subterraneus*, the title of the chapter, while it is an overt reference to a work by the Jesuit, Père Athanase Kircher, may also be a veiled reference to the caverns under Venusberg, the mountain of delight and love, situated between Eisenach and Gotha where, according to medieval German legend, the Lady Venus held her court. This is suggested by the fact that the visit to the archbishop's palace begins with a descent into *les grottes*, an architectural form characterised by decoration with shells (attributes of Venus). The technique known as *la rocaille*, the origin of the rococo style, was first employed in the embellishment of garden grottoes.

A word about *la rocaille* is called for here. According to one authority: "As early as the seventeenth century *rocaille* was used for the shellwork in grottoes and gardens, *travail de rocaille* being the equivalent of *travail de coquille*."[49] The word *rocaille* itself derives from *roc* and is defined by Larousse as "Terrain rempli de cailloux". The emphasis placed on rocks and shells in *Portrait de l'artiste* makes it appear to be a *travail de rocaille* in itself. Apart from the litany of rocks which I have already mentioned, and which is repeated in a truncated form, there is the *incrustation de coquillages* of the *Mundus subterraneus*, while in the next chapter but one, "Orbites", shells combine with clouds in a sort of poem which has a surrealist quality. In the following quotation I have omitted the blocks of text (of variable length) which intervene between the lines:

> "Tonnes de nuages.
> Truites d'algues de nuages.
> Troupeaux de nuages
> Branles de fleurs de nuages
> Torches de plumes de praires de nuages
> Ombres d'ecroulement de vergers de porcelaines de nuages.
> Moissons de ruines de flammes de murex de nuages.
> Vendanges de grappes d'huîtres de nuages.
> Frondaisons de fougères de nuages." (P. 183-188).

One of Butor's most vivid memories of a former visit to Germany is recalled early on in the *Portrait* in the following terms:

> "une grande prairie en pente, très caillouteuse ruissèlante, magnifiquement bruissante d'eaux; grand vent aussi, à l'horizon très élevé une course de nuages;" (P. 47).

Here it is *cailloux* and *nuages* that are linked but it seems to me that since *rocaille* means a *terrain rempli de cailloux*, Butor is exploiting what he has elsewhere called the "très beau chatoiement"[50] of the word which makes it virtually interchangeable with *coquille*. This *coquille-rocaille* interplay is also present in the word *kieselguhr*, meaning gravel in German, mentioned in the litany of minerals (P. 98) and again on page 178 where it appears as the name of an organ stop. According to Larousse, "Le kieselguhr, dont un gisement important se trouve près de Brunswick, (Hanover) est formée de coquilles microscopiques." In this instance, shells *become* rock, thus suffer a metamorphosis, as decayed vegetation resulted in coal deposits. The alchemists believed that minerals were living substances, capable of growth, the base metals destined, with the passage of time, to become precious, hence the idea that the alchemist, by the process of transmutation, usurped the function of time. This brings us back to the notion of metamorphosis and it is amusing to note Molly Bloom's reply to her husband's attempt to explain the related concept of metempsychosis: "O rocks! she said. Tell us in plain words."[51]

The clouds to which repeated reference is made in the passage quoted above recall a phrase which Joyce tells us, Stephen "drew forth from his treasure and spoke softly to himself: - A day of dappled sea-borne clouds."[52] Some other references to the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* should be noted.

At the beginning of the *Mundus subterraneus* chapter, Butor describes how, in his wanderings in the countryside, he imagined that the hills concealed a network of caves, rich in mineral deposits, communicating with the towers of the castle and the old convents of the region. These caves, he fancied, housed:

> "... des abbés à la barbe at aux cheveux blancs comme neige, qui surveillaient sur leurs brasiers doux l'éclosion de femmes d'or.
>
> Dédales en robes de bure ... depuis des siècles ils préparaient de longues ailes aux plumes de cygne." (P. 153).

He dreams of gaining possession of the magic word which would induce them to fasten these wings to his shoulders and then of taking flight until the cold would force him to descend and reveal to them his real identity as an "étudiant français en vacances chez le comte." He would return the wings and pledge his silence in return for initiation into their secrets. Stephen, too, wished to fly; to fly by the nets of nationality, language, religion, nets flung at his soul to keep it back from flight. His last prayer is to Daedalus: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead."

The Jesuit order, which played such an important part in the formation of both Joyce and Butor[53], is represented in the *Portrait* by *Père 'Uriel' Athanase Kircher*, the author of *Mundus subterraneus* and *l'Iter Extaticum*, the Virgil under whose guidance Butor says: "je me baignais dans la musique des sphères, je sautais de la Lune à Mars et à Mercure -" (P. 106). There is a portrait of him in the arch-bishop's palace. The emphasis on the rococo may contain another veiled reference to the Jesuits, since Baudelaire christened the style (at least when applied to church architecture), *le style jesuite*, "Rococo de la Réligion", noting that it was a "Style de génie, ambigu et complexe ... - (Coquet et terrible.).[54] There is an echo of Joyce, too, in the series of lectures given by Butor's great-uncle "sur le problème de Dieu", which Butor attended, that problem not having ceased to torment him. The fact that "Un certain nombre de jeunes thomistes venaient y faire du chahut" (P. 38) recalls Joyce's debt to St. Thomas Aquinas, about whose aesthetics Stephen delivers a lecture to his friend Lynch, who remarks:

> "It amuses me vastly, ... to hear you quoting him time after time like a jolly round friar. Are you laughing in your sleeve?"[55]

a comment which could be applied perhaps to Butor's frequent quotation from Kircher in *Portrait de l'artiste.*

Stephen's lapse into the seven deadly sins and his valiant effort to practise the seven virtues in their stead, with the help of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, as well as his status as a student of the seven liberal arts (the quadrivium and trivium) have their parallels in Butor's book, where the insistance on the magic number seven is even more pronounced. The *Prince-Propriétaire* owns seven castles, Butor's stay lasts seven weeks, he dreams seven dreams and a section of the book is dedicated to each of the seven days of the week, which are associated with the seven metals of alchemy and the seven colours of the spectrum. In the arch-bishop's palace there is a "salle des vices et vertus" whereas the seven liberal arts recur like a refrain throughout the book.[56] It may be that Butor was tempted to commit some at least of the seven deadly sins during his stay in Germany. As I have suggested, there is an aura of *luxure* about the *Mundus subterraneus* chapter. The patience which he teaches the count called *les moyens de parvenir*, the increasing tendency, which he himself notes, to speak of "*nos* variscites en rognon veinés," may argue a desire to forget his bourgeois origins in a dream of *luxe, calme et volupté*. Perhaps it is this danger that he is fleeing from when he says, at the end of the book, in words very like those employed by Stephen:

> "C'était le lundi du départ, il fallait s'arracher, il était grand temps de fuir, non seulement le château, non seulement l'Allemagne... " (P. 228).

It may be that he feels the pull of the *genius loci* too strongly; a paragraph right at the beginning of the book sheds an interesting light on this hypothesis:

> " - il y avait une tradition dans la branche maternelle de ma famille concernant un certain Ergatus Toxer, lieutenant d'Attila, qui aurait fait souche dans la région des Champs Catalauniques, à qui l'on faisait remonter, pour des raisons d'onomastique, tels ancêtres châlonnais, source de plaisanteries entre frères, si bien que dans mes rages ou mes rêves je me sentais, me sens encore quelque peu hun," (P. 22).

Perhaps Butor felt that certain aspects of the German character aroused dangerously sympathetic echoes in him; not its militarism certainly, but perhaps the over-weening desire to dominate through knowledge, of which Faust is the classic example, and the willingness to enlist dark forces to aid in the achievement of this ambition. The second last quotation from the *livre du château de H.* reads: "'22 mai 1761: Anton Storz, pour commerce avec le diable et recherche de trésors, justiciée par l'épée...'" (P. 218).

At any event there is a strong suggestion that Butor's departure from Germany is analogous to the freeing of the second Calendar from his metamorphosis, an event which is echoed, with variations, in Butor's dreams. Neither the Calendar nor Butor's dream-self emerges whole from his experience, since each of them loses an eye. Significantly, on the eve of his departure, Butor's right eye becomes severely painful. The metamorphosis that took effect at Augsburg will not be lifted without leaving its mark. The *livre du château de H.* is a reminder that brutality and horror are never far below the surface and that they exert their own particular kind of fascination, witness the popularity of the horror story. "Notre relation profonde avec le Moyen Age" manifests itself in sinister ways, Butor seems to suggest; for example, the brutality in the eighteenth century, the age of the baroque and the enlightenment, of which the *livre du château* is proof, and the more recent atrocities of the Second World War. There is a powerful impulse toward evil in all men, it seems. It is significant that Butor employs the obsolete name Franconia for the part of Germany in which his story takes place, thus underlining its connection with the Franks, his paternal ancestors, and on the last page of the book we read:

> "à cette époque Napoléon avait englouti
> la principauté dans le Royaume de Bavière,
> le Saint-Empire n'existait plus," (P. 228).

The French, too, had their dream of military conquest and world dominion.

One can only speculate about the nature of the threat which Butor feels hanging over him, but it represents some kind of darkening of the intellect or of the soul against which he prays: "o beauté, protège-moi, beauté! ... o clarté, protège-moi!" (P. 207). Confronted with the record of torture and death in *La Tour des Supplices*, and having just returned from a nearly devastated Munich where art is making a brave flourish among the ruins, he finds reassurance in the catalogue of the "Musée des Sciences Naturelles et des Techniques, dit le Musée allemand", which is incorporated into the litany of his invocations to Beauty and Light. We read, at the bottom of page 206, "(o souvenirs du musée des sciences naturelles et des techniques de la capitale bavaroise, comme vous étiez rassurants!),". Significantly, he had dreamed the night before that:

> "Insensiblement l'air s'obscurcissait de sorte qu'il semblait qu'il fit nuit et que la machine du monde s'allât dissoudre." (P. 195).

The German Museum is remarkable for its exhibits of working models of all kinds of machines which visitors may operate, as an aid to understanding their basic principles. It is an impressive record of the advances in technology which have wrought a continuing metamorphosis on the world and man's perception of it - of progress, in terms of mastery of the environment, at least. By setting up a contrast between the catalogue of the Museum and the *livre du château de H.*, Butor seems to be reaffirming his faith in progress, in spite of lapses into barbarism, his belief in the positive achievements of technology and in the capacity of Enlightenment eventually to overcome the powers of darkness.

At the end of *Portrait of the Artist*, Stephen turns eastward toward Europe; Butor, from a different vantage point but with a similar orientation, turns toward Egypt, where, he telle us, he experienced "pour ainsi dire une seconde enfance." It was after his sojourn in Egypt that he was able to write his first novel *Passage de Milan*, a book set in Paris and with a strongly autobiographical background. Like Joyce, it was necessary for him to put a distance between himself and his native land before he could begin to write about it, and not only his native land, in Butor's case, but of any *site*, geographically speaking, and of any situation, historically speaking. He has said in an interview:

> "J'ai besoin, pour parler de quelque chose, d'un certain écart. C'est pourquoi, par exemple *Passage de Milan*, mon premier roman, qui se passe à Paris, dans un immeuble parisien, est un livre qui a été écrit en Egypte et à Manchester... Je pourrais multiplier les exemples. J'ai besoin de prendre du recul pour parler de quelque chose, un recul géographique."[57]

With the broadening scope of his travel, this need has gradually diminished, he finds, to the point where he is capable of establishing "une distance littéraire", but only, he says, because "je dispose des filtres de l'Egypte, des Etats-Unis, du Japon etc."[58] It seems to me that this *recul géographique* is very closely related to the process Butor describes at the beginning of the *Portrait*, by which the painter succeeds in accurately rendering the eyes of his sitter, capturing the intensity of their gaze as well as their setting, shape and colour. The eye, fascinating the artist, and luring him into its depths, cannot be reproduced as long as it is present to him. Fortunately, the sitter cannot maintain his pose indefinitely:

> "En effet, après un quart d'heure de pose, le modèle ne pouvait plus regarder l'artiste de cette façon, et c'était une fois que le regard s'etait absente qu'il s'agissait de le retrouver vivant sur la toile". (P. 18)

The artist then has to *invent* what is absent for him:

> "Cette couleur, il lui fallait donc d'abord la perdre, la noyer dans son attention même, pour pouvoir la reconstituer, l'inventer comme mode de liaison nécessaire entre le noir de la pupille et toute la coloration bien vérifiable des joues, des pommettes, des sourcils, des paupières même," (P. 18).

John Sturrock convincingly compares the colouring of the eye to the novel (it might be more accurate, in Butor's case, to say the book). It is, he says, "the intrusion of the absent into the present."[59] In the case of the portrait, it is the artist's invention that endows it with the same powers of fascination as the original. Sturrock argues that as far as Butor is concerned, the novel (I would prefer to say the work of art) is "an abstraction which has to be fought for against the powers of fascination which hold us speechless." (P. 128), and that the reader's responsibility is to "resist this fascination by his own capacity for abstraction - he must mimic the activity of the artist." (P. 129).

As I pointed out, the works of *Romanesque 2*, so called, would indicate an effort on Butor's part to develop this capacity for abstraction in the reader. If this is so, the critical reception given to the *Portrait*, which in some respects is closer to the former than to the latter, must have confirmed his belief in the need for such an enterprise.

There is more to Butor's departure into Egypt, however, one feels, than simply a desire to put some distance between himself and Europe. The last words of *Portrait de l'artiste* convey a strong feeling of compulsion, which, it is implied, has its origin in Butor's experience in Germany:

> "Comment, après cela, dès la première
> possibilité offerte, comment aurais-je pu
> ne pas m'embarquer pour l'Egypte?"

Egypt figures in the book under a variety of guises; in the

Arabian Nights, for example, and in Mann's novel *Joseph en Egypt*, which Butor reads during his stay, and which in turn gives rise to the patience of the same name. Then, less directly, there is Kircher's documented interest in Egyptian civilisation, particularly in hieroglyphics, while alchemy is generally held to be of Arabian origin, the name itself deriving from the Arabic, *alkimia*, in which "al" is the definite article.

While Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, for Butor it is a land of re-birth, the place where like the heroes of Jules Verne, he discovers his *element*. Egypt, with its ancient civilisation, represents *l'âge d'or par excellence*, a dream which is evoked again at the end of the *Portrait*, in the course of the patience *La Roue des Planètes*:

> "puis se reposer en faisant apparaître au-dessus de l'horizon le roi de trèfle, Saturne, son règne transmuable en âge d'or" (P. 217).

In the same way, perhaps, Egypt, the land of bondage, can be turned into the Promised Land. It appears that like Mann and Joyce, Butor has found that exile and banishment, even if self-imposed, can be fruitful experiences for the artist, of whom Joseph, with his many-coloured coat and his prophetic dreams, is a figure. The years in Egypt were necessary to gain a perspective on European consciousness. The pilgrimage had to be made back from the Deutsche Museum to the Museion of Alexandria (where Stephen Dedalus hoped to send copies of his epiphanies "on green oval leaves"[60]), in search of the *point suprême*, the Philosopher's Stone, which would transform the *frère lai*, the *jeune singe*, into a fully fledged artist, an *adepte*.

> "Dans le symbolique mediévale le singe représente l'artiste et surtout cet artiste par excellence l'alchimiste. L'un imite la nature, l'autre dans le secret de son laboratoire, entre sa chaudière et ses cornues, refait inlassablement la création du monde."
>
> Butor

The *orgie de déchiffrage* I have indulged in up to this point by no means exhausts the possibilities of *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe.* It was not my object to do so, even if such a feat were possible, but rather to demonstrate the book's remarkable range. In it, Butor has realised his ambition to create "[une nouvelle forme romanesque] dont le pouvoir d'intégration soit plus grand," (R 1, 9), on a scale unequalled even by his earlier works. When Georges Raillard remarked that: "... je n'ai pas pénétré complètement les arcanes du livre,", meaning the *Portrait*, Butor rejoined:

> "Moi non plus sans doute. Pénètre-t-on jamais complètement les arcanes d'un livre? Pourvu qu'il en ait, que ce soit vraiment un livre, la critique n'est-elle pas inépuisable?
>
> Lorsque je parle à quelqu'un d'un ouvrage que je suis en train de faire, l'image qui revient le plus souvent est: je voudrais réaliser une sorte de cristal."[61]

This last remark puts the emphasis on mineralogy and its related science, crystallography, in the *Portrait*, in an interesting perspective. The multi-facetted nature of Butor's books, as well as their highly developed internal structure, confers on them a crystalline quality, given that a crystal is an "aggregation of molecules with definite internal structure and external form of solid enclosed by symmetrically arranged plane faces." As far as the last characteristic is concerned, the importance of the number seven in the *Portrait* should be borne in mind. It would not be extravagant to describe the book as a heptahedron; particularly as this is a figure which Butor has applied, in his critical writing, to other works.[62] That crystals are subject to metamorphism, links them with the alchemical theme, hence too, with the belief that minerals were living substances, a corollary to the concept of a universal *anima* in nature.

It is hardly necessary to point out that Butor's interest in alchemy does not derive from a desire to find the Philosopher's Stone, unless of course this is understood in a metaphorical sense. He has declared that:

> "Dans ce livre je me sers du vocabulaire alchimique comme le mystique allemand Jacob Boëhme s'en servait pour expliquer le christianisme. Seulement, moi c'est autre chose que j'explique."[63]

Butor is explaining a number of things through the medium of alchemy in the *Portrait*, but given his observation about "l'arcane du livre", it would be foolhardy to attempt to draw up a definitive list of what they are.

However, it is clear that the phenomenon which is primarily presented as analogous to alchemy in the *Portrait*, is art, and more particularly, literature, which not only changes the world, but the writer too, not least in that writing stays "l'arrêt de mort": a feat related to the distillation of the Elixir of Youth, which, according to popular belief, the alchemists also performed.

In his essay on alchemy, Butor states that the Great Work is in fact:

> "... un abregé minéral de l'histoire du monde de sa création à sa perfection. Il est un microcosme a l'intérieur duquel l'alchimiste cherche à vérifier expérimentalement ses opinions sur la structure de l'univers, et de cet autre microcosme qu'est l'homme." (R 1, 16).

Except for the emphasis on mineralogy, this describes the writer's activity, surely? Again the difficulty of access of the alchemical treatises was essential, Butor assures us, "car il s'agit de transformer la mentalité du lecteur afin de le rendre capable de percevoir le sens des actes décrits." (P. 17), statements whose application to his own work needs no further elucidation. He brings out too, the importance for the alchemists of tradition in the strongest sense of the word. According to Butor:

> "Il n'existe pas de texte classique dans lequel l'auteur nous déclare qu'il a tout découvert par lui-même. Il ne prétend

> jamais que refaire, à la rigueur perfectionner, ce que d'autres ont fait avant lui." (R 1, 14).

To apply this dictum rigorously to the writer might appear to contradict Butor's conviction that for a new consciousness, new forms must be found, and yet, the reader will remember the emphasis he puts on the retroactive power of true innovation and the devoted study he has made of the great writers of the past.

I have already referred to the idea that the alchemist took the place of time; that the Great Work represented an acceleration of time, which unaided, would ultimately have brought about the transmutation in the bowels of the earth. It is fascinating that in an "Eloge de la machine à écrire" (which appeared, appropriately, in the number of *L'Arc* dedicated to Gutenburg), Butor describes the typewriter as a "Machine à traverser le temps".[64] This is because it permits him to "objectiver immédiatement le texte, de me le faire voir;", thus drastically abbreviating the old cycle: manuscript, galley proofs, reappropriation by means of corrections, again in manuscript, and finally the definitive printed version. (This need to *objectify* the text corroborates my earlier remarks about the capacity for abstraction required of the artist.) Butor, in the same piece, points out the ambivalence of the writer/scribe relationship, a subject which is treated with some irony in *Portrait de l'artiste*. Like the alchemist, the artist is in some sense an artisan. He works with his hands; witness the word *manuscrit*.[65]

In terms of *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*, then, the *adepte* is the writer. As for alchemy, "on ne peut plus y croire", Butor says, nonetheless, it retains "... une valeur de vérité comme poésie très grande."[66] This derives from its capacity to resolve certain basic contradictions, a faculty which the surrealists have exploited. It was this same quality which impressed Jung in its implications for psychology, in particular for what he terms the individuation process. This would seem to be particularly relevant to a book dealing with the emerging consciousness of the artist.[67] As far as the poetic value of alchemy is concerned, it should be noted that the resolution of antimonies, together with the concept of transmutation, is closely allied to the idea of *l'analogie universelle*, which could be described as the mainspring of poetic thought since Baudelaire. The distance from *Les Correspondances* to the surrealist game, *L'Un dans l'autre*[68] is not really that great, and it appears that the alchemists' use of symbolic language foreshadowed this development. Operating on the premise that "L'échelle des créatures comporte ... quatre règnes hiérarchises: minéral, vegétal, animal, et angélique."[69], the alchemist felt at liberty to transpose elements from one to another of these *règnes*. Moreover, since the route to be followed in *Le Grande Oeuvre* was often conceived in terms of another incredible journey "de la terre à la lune, de la lune au soleil, du soleil au ciel étoile ou paradis", (R 1, 18), they could speak of the sun and the moon as gold and silver. As Butor points out, "Les textes alchimiques nous replongent dans un univers mental dans lequel tout peut être considéré comme symbolique." (R 1, 18). If the dictates of rationalism should suggest that both alchemists and surrealists are charlatans, we might do well to remember that our age has witnessed the transformation of matter. The following comment by Lord Clark is particularly relevant here:

> "When scientists could use a mathematical idea to transform matter they had achieved the same quasi-magical relationship with the material world as artists. Look at Karsh's photograph of Einstein. Where have we seen that face before? The aged Rembrandt."[70]

Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe differs from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in one important respect: it is a product of the writer's maturity and as such it does not suffer from the rather uncontrolled lyricism of Joyce's book. From this point of view, it is more in the line of *Ulysses*, and though it is much shorter, its range of reference and impulse toward a totalisation of experience, if not on the same scale as Joyce's masterpiece, may at least be measured by the same standard. I do not think it can be called a manifesto, the term Butor applied to the *Portrait of the Artist*, but rather a practical demonstration of a position which an earlier manifesto might have declared, a position which is very close to Joyce's, as Harry Levin describes it:

> "In positive devotion to his self-imposed labours, with all the earnestness of a religion and all the playfulness of a game, he carried the discipline and the indulgence of art to greater lengths than any writer had done before or was likely to do again."[71]

The balance between the discipline and the indulgence of art is beautifully kept in *Portrait de l'artists en jeune singe*, which, as I said at the beginning, has all the earnestness of a religion, and all the playfulness of a game.

[1] Paris: Gallimard, 1967.

[2] *Iter Extaticum* is a work by le Père Athanase Kircher, read by Butor in the count's library. *Mundus Subterraneus, quo subterrestris mundi opificium, universae denique naturae divitiae, abditorum effectuum causae demobstrantur* (1665-1668).

[3] Robert Kanters, "Michel Butor ou le jeune alchimiste," *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 1102, 29 mai 1967, pp. 19-20.

[4] Alain Bosquet, "Michel Butor et les paliers de l'ecriture," *Combat*, No. 7170, 3 août 1967.

[5] See for example Claude Mauriac, "A la recherche du temps et du secret perdus, 'Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe' de Michel Butor," *Le Figaro*, no. 7047, 24 avril 1967.

[6] Mauriac, op. cit.

[7] Michel Butor, interview, *Les Lettres Françaises*, 1178, 13 avril 1967, pp. 5-7. Butor uses the same expression in connection with Leiris's autobiography *L'Age d'Homme:*

> "De même que *l'Age d'Homme* developpait considérablement, approfondissait, prenait par les cornes certains des faits, certaines difficultés effleurées par le poème *Liquidation*, de même à l'intérieur du cadre tracé par cette première autobiographie, *Le Règle du jeu* va mener une enquête incomparablement plus poussée. (R 1, 265).

It seems to me that it is the autobiographical *form* rather than its content, that Butor takes by the horns in the *Portrait*.

[8] One critic only, to my knowledge, has commented on this: Roger Borderie, "Une langue sept fois tournée dans la bouche," *Le Nouvelle Revue Française*, No. 176 (1 août 1967) pp. 299-305. Given the dominance of the number 7 in *Portrait*, it is interesting that it appeared in 1967, seven years after *Mobile*, which marked the watershed in Butor's work.

[9] See note 7. It is here too that his remark about the book being *rusé* occurs.

[10] Roger Borderie, op. cit., p. 305.

[11] For a discussion of literature and alchemy in Butor's work, see J. H. Matthews, "Michel Butor: L'alchemie et le roman," *Un nouveau roman? recherches et tradition* (Paris: Minard, Lettres Modernes, 1964).

[12] Paris: Eric Losfeld, 1970.

[13] For a particularly clear exposé of this aspect of surrealism, see Michel Carrouges, *André Breton et les données fondamentales du surréalisme*, Collection Idées (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), especially chapter 2, "Esoterisme et surréalisme."

[14] See Charbonnier, p. 39 and p. 36. The whole of section 3, appropriately called "Une et mille et une nuits" is relevant.

[15] See C. A. Burland, *The arts of the alchemists*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967) pp. 18, 171. See also the words attributed to Fulcanelli in Jacques Sadoul, *Le trésor des alchimistes* (Paris: Publications premières, 1970), p. 278. "L'essentiel n'est pas la transmutation des métaux, mais celle de l'experimentateur lui-même."

[16] Levin, op. cit., p. 177.

[17] John Read, in *The Alchemist in Life, Literature and Art*, (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1947) draws attention to another curious link between alchemy and play.

> "It is frequently stated in the esoteric writings on alchemy that once the primitive materials of the stone have been obtained, the rest of the operations of the great work are 'only a labour fit for women, or child's play.' This *ludus puerorum* motive often comes to the surface in sixteenth century art, as for example, in the works of Dürer's contemporary, Cranach. The infants may be linked on the one hand

> with the alchemical idea of regeneration, and on the other with the mythological story of Saturn, and thus with the conception of melancholy.
>
> All three of Cranach's representations of Melancholy show infants at play." (P. 60).

Dürer's well-known wood-cut of Melancholia also shows an infant, albeit passive. Read provides a very interesting iconographic commentary on this work, which he considers to be a "rich repository of the pictorial symbolism of alchemy." See *PA*, 129, "contemplais dans la Salle des Chevaliers *La Mélancolie* de Dürer".

[18] Encyclopedia of World Art, Vol. 12 (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1960) p. 243. Article on the Rococo by Hans Sedlmayr and Hermann Bauer. Also p. 255.

[19] See Raillard, *Butor*, p. 19.

[20] This locution may seem odd but it describes exactly the effect achieved by Butor. The reader is made aware that the other reader (Butor himself), his double, is aware yet unaware of the noise. See *Portrait de l'artiste*, pp. 102-103. This *tour de force* is very similar to that attributed to Monet by Proust:

> "A cet endroit de la toile, peindre, ni ce qu'on voit puisqu'on ne voit rien, ni ce qu'on ne voit pas puisqu'on ne doit peindre que ce qu'on voit, mais peindre *qu'on ne voit pas*, que la défaillance de l'oeil qui ne peut pas voguer sur le bruillard lui soit infligée sur la toile comme sur la rivière, c'est bien beau.",

quoted and commented on by Butor in "Les oeuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust" where he points out that it was necessary for Proust to complete the formula "peindre qu'on ne voit pas" so as to read "peindre qu'on ne voit pas ce qu'on voit." (P. 267). In Butor's case it would be a question of "décrire qu'on n'entend pas ce qu'on entend."

[21] Interestingly, however, all the major authors are missing, having been sold to meet death duties. As an additional factor linking the Middle Ages with the eighteenth

century, in the book, it should be noted that the library seems to be made up of eighteenth century writers on the one hand, and incunabula, i.e. books produced before 1500, on the other.

[22] Lord Clark, *Civilisation: a personal view* (London: B.B.C. and John Murray, 1969) p. 221.

[23] For Butor and the Baroque, see Raillard, "De quelques éléments baroques dans les romans de Michel Butor", *Cahiers de l'Association International des Etudes Françaises*, no. 14 (mars, 1962), 179-194.

[24] Op. cit., p. 231.

[25] See *PA*, Chapter 9, for a particularly sumptuous interior.

[26] "Butor s'Explique," Entrevue avec Jacqueline Piatier, *Le Monde (des Livres)*, 22 mars 1967.

[27] Clark, p. 226.

[28] See John Read, op. cit., p. 58.

[29] Ibid., pp. 72-79.

[30] Interview with Jacqueline Piatier, loc. cit.

[31] Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, trans. Stephen Corrin, (London: Rider & Co., 1962), p. 171.

[32] The Sudetenland comprised the western frontier regions of Bohemia and had attracted German settlers since the Middle Ages, but after World War I it was given to Czechoslovakia. The German minority continued to create problems for the Czechoslovak republic, particularly with the emergence of a nazi-type political party. The Munich Conference of 1938 forced Prague to cede to the Reich all

territories with more than a fifty per cent German population. This was reversed at the Potsdam Conference. See article on Sudetenland, Colliers Encyclopedia.

[33] See Claude Mauriac, op. cit.

[34] See *Encyclopedia of World Art*, Vol. 3 article on Callot by A. Hyatt Mayor. Callot (?1592-1635) was a native of Lorraine and was responsible for considerable technological advances in the art of engraving. His *Capricci de Veri Figure* are to be noted in connection with the sub-title of the Portrait. In 1633 he produced his 6 *Petites Misères de la Guerre* and his 18 *Grandes Misères de la Guerre*, "the first unromantic pictures of war, exposing its impersonal cruelty, casual violence and senseless destruction." It is interesting that Butor refers to these works as *Désastres de la Guerre*, confusing them, perhaps deliberately, with a similar series of works by Goya. The latter, too, did a series of *Caprichos* in which the gay Italian form is turned into biting social satire, with vicious double-entendre. Both Callot and Goya inspired certain poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Callot's influence on eighteenth century art was considerable and it is notable that this is expressed in two opposed currents, just as his work includes paintings of the Commedia dell'Arte as well as the *Misères de la Guerre*. If Goya's work is an echo of the latter, the influence of the former is clearly evident in the paintings of Watteau, the exquisite artist of the Rococo.

In the context of the *Portrait*, Callot's connection with Lorraine is significant, in view of the province's role in Franco-German relations.

[35] See Jean Rousset, *La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France, Circe et le Paon* (Paris: Corti, 1954).

[36] See particularly pp. 124-128 and 133-139. The chapter is entitled "La Flamme et la Bulle (La vie fugitive et le monde en mouvement.)"

In the same connection, note the following sentence from Proust, quoted by Butor in "Les oeuvres d'art imaginaires":

> "Elle la petite phrase était encore là comme une bulle irisée qui se soutient. Tel un arc-en-ciel dont l'éclat faiblit, s'abaisse, puis se relève et, avant de s'éteindre, s'exalte un moment comme il n'avait pas encore fait: aux deux couleurs qu'elle avait jusqu-là laissé paraître, elle ajouta d'autres cordes diaprées, toutes celles du prisme, et les fit chanter." (R 2, 262).

According to Rousset, the rainbow is another characteristic emblem of the baroque. It is not my object to suggest that Proust is a baroque writer, but rather to show that there would seem to be an archetypal imagery to which artists in different ages and media have recourse. This point is relevant to *Portrait de l'artiste*, which seems to suggest that the fountain-head of this imagery lies in the symbolism of alchemy. The rainbow is an analogue of the "peacock's tail", the prismatic hue which appeared in the athanor of the alchemist at one point in the Great Work.

An iconographic study of the rainbow would exceed the bounds of this discussion, but it should be noted that it appears in Christian art, for example in the mosaics of San Marco and in the Last Judgment of the Rococo Wieskirche, in Bavaria, and it is featured in the works of the German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, who is referred to in the *Portrait*.

[37] *The Essential James Joyce*, ed. Harry Levin (Penguin Books, 1963) p. 51. This is in fact a misquotation. The line is number 188.

[38] Butterflies are mentioned several times in *Portrait*. One of the books in the library is *Les Papillons de Surinam*. There is a connection with alchemy, perhaps, in the fact that the word *chrysalis* has its root in the Greek *khrusos*, meaning gold.

[39] See Raillard, *Butor*, p. 16.

[40] See p. 59. "Derrière lui, sur le mur, au-dessus d'un divan, un grand tableau représentant grandeur nature un jeune homme debout, de face, qui lui ressemblait, en uniforme d'officier de l'armée allemande, avec la croix de fer. ... C'est le portrait de mon frère, mort pendant

la campagne de Russie...'" On page 218 the resemblance between the count and his brother is emphasised and there is a suggestion that Butor identifies them with Cain and Abel, the warring brothers.

[41] The construction of this passage is interesting because of the manner in which Butor causes one room to merge into the other. The paragraph I have quoted records the passage from "le salon des dieux de l'Olympe" to "la salle des Métamorphoses d'Ovide" in a way which is admirably effective and economical but a little confusing at the beginning until one realises that the phrase, "la salle des Métamorphoses d'Ovide" is to be applied retrospectively. Failure to do so will not, however, make nonsense of the passage, since the subjects depicted in both the *salon* and the *salle* will overlap, given the nature of Ovid's poem.

[42] Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, quoted in Read, op. cit., p. 43.

[43] For the Second Calender's Tale, see *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*, translated by Captain Sir R. F. Burton (London: Nichols, MCDDDXCVII) Vol. 1, pp. 104-128.

[44] I refer to the chapter, not the building, which, since it possesses "365 fenêtres plus une lucarne" can hardly be called a miniature.

[45] The symbolic resonance of the names of the days of the wook is brought out in the *Portrait*, another instance of how Butor demonstrates the manner in which myth subtends our daily lives, though we are for the most part unaware of it. Butor arrives and leaves on a Monday and the intervening "daylight" chapters follow the sequence of the days of the week, though I can find no reference to Sunday.

[46] The expression *vieille peau* also occurs in *Passage de Milan*, applied to Madame Vertigues by her husband. It is one of the many current expressions which betray society's reduction of women to objects. Here a woman is reduced to a wrinkled piece of skin, like a discarded glove. The male equivalent in Butor's canon, *vil séducteur*, though perhaps morally repugnant, retains his status as an active human being.

[47] There is a similar table in the count's library, on which Butor discovers a volume of Jacob Boehme. A round table is a feature of many of Teniers' paintings of alchemists. The oval is characteristic of the rococo architecture of Bavaria.

[48] The countess is, so to speak, conspicuous by her absence, for most of the book, which has the effect of making one attach all the more importance to her rare appearances. On page 123 we read:

> "L'élégance de la comtesse, l'allure, son air si noble, si aisé, la douceur et l'honnêteté avec lesquelles elle me recevait, quant à ses yeux..."

In the *prelude* to the book Butor has pointed out that it is only "lorsque je regarde mal quelqu'un" that he notices the colour of their eyes. We conclude therefore that he has looked closely at the countess, yet he rarely speaks of her. Then the phrases quoted above are applied almost word for word to the young woman with whom he falls in love in his dreams. Finally, when he is saying good-bye to the countess, he bursts into tears.

[49] *The Encyclopedia of Modern Art*, Vol. 12, p. 231, article on the Rococo by Hans Sedlmayr and Hermann Bauer.

[50] Clouds, flames and ruins are all characteristic of baroque art. The shells, the algae and the ferns are all attributes of Venus. See "Les oeuvres d'art imaginaires chez Proust", R 1, p. 288.

[51] Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 64.

[52] *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 252.

[53] See Raillard, *Butor*, p. 14. "M. B. entre au Collège Saint-François-de-Sales, tenu par les Pères jesuites;, 'J'en ai gardé un souvenir ineffaçable' (cela dit sur un ton expressif)."

[54] Charles Baudelaire, "Notes et pensées sur l'art, Pauvre Belgique," *Ecrits sur l'art*, tome 2 (Paris: Livres de Poche, 1971), p. 368 and p. 375.

[55] Joyce, *Portrait*, p. 216.

[56] They are represented, for example, by the classifications of the count's library: see p. 205, "comme je parcourais une dernière fois les rayons de la dialectique, de la geométrie, de l'arithmétique." The quadrivium was the four-fold way to knowledge, the trivium the threefold way to eloquence. The seven liberal arts are enumerated in the following hexameter:

> Lingua, Tropus, Ratio, Numerus, Tonus,
> Angulus, Astra.

and in the two following:

> Gram. loquitur, Dia. vera docet, Rhet. verba colorat;
> Mus. cadit, Ar. numerat, Geo. ponderat, Ast. colit astra.

See Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, rev. Ivor H. Evans, (New York: Cassell, 1959).

[57] "Michel Butor a reponse à tous"

[58] Ibid.

[59] John Sturrock, *The French New Novel*, p. 129.

[60] *Ulysses*, p. 40. It is interesting that in his dreams, Butor's major talent consists in "graver avec un style de fer sur deliées écorces les caractères de notre écriture allemande" (p. 64). These *deliées écorces* may be related to Stephen's "green oval leaves."

[61] Raillard, p. 267.

[62] See "Heptaèdre Héliotrope," *Répertoire III*, pp. 325-351, an article on Breton which makes revealing reading where *Portrait* is concerned. Also, "Les sept femmes de Gilbert le Mauvais, autre heptaèdre", L'Arc 47, 1971 and less directly, perhaps, "La Spirale des Sept Péchés", *Critique* no. 276, mai 1970, an article on Flaubert.

[63] Interview with J. Piatier

[64] *L'Arc*, No. 50

[65] In his dreams Butor describes himself throughout the *Portrait* as a skillful calligrapher and scribe, clearly with ironic intent. He lists his accomplishments as follows:

> "Je lui répondais que je connaissais la grande et la petite logique, que j'étais contrapuntiste, mythologue et surtout que j'écrivais parfaitement bien les caractères de l'écriture allemande." (P. 67).

Once transformed into a monkey, his versatility as a scribe seems to increase, as perhaps one might expect and he gives a virtuoso exhibition of his talents:

> "... je prenais la pointe et ne la quittais qu'après avoir réalisé des imitations de l'écriture de Basile Valentin, de celles de Jacob Boehme, du Père Athanase Kircher, de Jean-Paul Richter, Hegel, Marx et Enno Littmann." (P. 148).

The reference to parody is unmistakable here and it may well be that the quotations in the *Portrait* are apocryphal. Enno Littmann is a German translator of the Arabian Nights whose work is celebrated for its accuracy in letter and spirit.

The play on the writer/scribe relationship is one of the more humorous aspects of the *Portrait*.

[66] Interview with J. Piatier.

[67] See Carl G. Jung, *The Integration of the Personality*, trans. Stanley M. Dell (Farrar and Rinehart, New York, 1939); also Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy:*

> "The point is that alchemy is rather like the undercurrent to the Christianity that ruled on the surface. It is to this surface as the dream is to consciousness and just as the dream compensates the conflicts of the conscious mind, so alchemy endeavours to fill the gaps left by the Christian tension of opposites." (P. 23).

and again:

> "But the psychic part of the work did not disappear. It captured new interpreters, as we can see from the example of Faust and from the signal connection between our modern psychology of the unconscious and alchemical symbolism." (P. 37).

[68] Briefly, this game involves a member of the group leaving the room and while he is gone, deciding to return in the role of a particular object. Meanwhile the others will have chosen a role for him. On his return he will attempt to convey what he is, while the assembled company will try to get the role they have chosen for him across. Apparently, even where objects which differ sharply from each other are concerned, each will eventually, and sometimes rapidly, emerge. The person becomes a sort of living embodiment of a surrealist metaphor, or as Sartre has described it in a different context: "Ainsi réalise-t-il en chaque mot, par le seul effect de *l'attitude* poétique, les métaphores dont rêvait Picasso lorsquil souhaitait faire une boîte d'allumettes qui fut toute entiere chauve-souris sans cesser d'ètre boîte d'allumettes." (Sit. 2, 67).

[69] It should be noted that Butor published, with the artist Jacques Hérold, a book called *Dialogue des règnes, livre de luxe,* in 1964. Butor's text, somewhat revised, appears in *Illustrations 2*. Note that Père Kircher, a man whose thirst for knowledge equalled Butor's, is referred to as *Uriel*, one of the seven holy angels, depicted in *Paradise Lost* as "The Regent of the Sun" and "sharpest-sighted spirit of all in heaven." Given Butor's experience with the Jesuits, this may have an ironical flavour. Père Kircher, as an angel, would belong to the highest of the *quatre régnes.* It is customarily St. Thomas Aquinas who is referred to as the Angelic Doctor.

[70] Clark, op. cit., p. 344.

[71] Levin, op. cit., p. 215.

Words and Images

"In proportion as art becomes purer the number of people to whom it appeals gets less. It cuts out all the romantic overtones of life which are the usual bait by which men are induced to accept a work of art. It appeals only to the aesthetic sensibility, and that in most men is comparatively weak."

Roger Fry

Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe was Butor's last critical success. He has published several books since[1] but with each one he seems to become more isolated, at least in France, to the point almost of being a *poète maudit* in his own lifetime. Treated with condescension, or at best with regretful incomprehension by the Establishment[2], he is apparently also viewed with suspicion by the *avant-garde*, the proponents of what is now being called the *"'nouveau' nouveau roman"*[3]. A fragment of dialogue from the colloquium *Nouveau Roman: hier aujourd'hui* provides a concise example of these two opposing, but equally critical attitudes:

> "Léon S. Roudiez: 'Si l'on examine les oeuvres des cinq dernières années, on assiste à un démembrement de la phrase qui est reduite souvent à de simples succesions de mots...'
>
> Alain Robbe-Grillet: 'Mais la beauté transcendante reste...'
>
> Léon S. Roudiez: 'J'aimerais que, dans certains textes récents, vous me montriez cette beauté transcendante...'"[4]

According to Robbe-Grillet, "la polysémie du texte" has a very different connotation in Butor's work than in the work of the group of which he counts himself one. The difference is as between centripetal and centrifugal forces: "La polysémie du texte n'est chez Butor que la dispersion d'une présence globale tandis que chez nous, au contraire, cette polysémie instaure une opposition de sens irreductibles."[5] *Beauté transcendante, présence globale,* whatever this "quelque chose derrière"[6] is called, the traditionalists lament its absence, the *avant-garde* find it all too present in Butor's work. Which of them is correct? To what degree are their conflictingly adverse reactions justified? The implications of these questions are far-reaching for both *technique* and *métaphysique*.

The debate about Butor centres around two closely related questions: language and cultural context. Broadly speaking, the position of the *"nouveau" nouveau romanciers* is summed up in the following two remarks of Robbe-Grillet's:

> "L'Ecriture de Butor ne serait donc, en fin de compte, comme celle du passé, que le déchiffrement de l'oeuvre d'un Dieu... alors que, au contraire, nous écrivons aujourd'hui dans une toute autre perspective; puisque ce que nous tentons d'opérer, c'est la création de l'homme par le langage comme s'il n'avait pas été crée par Dieu. Ce 'comme si' étant dit par précaution rhétorique vis-à-vis des chrétiens."

and again:

> "Butor cherche toujours à trouver un accord possible du moi et du monde, alors que pour nous ça n'a plus guère de sens."[7]

The massive dimensions of the *injection culturelle* (to use a phrase of Ricardou's) in Butor's work is clear, as is also the fact that its thrust has always been one of re-integration, a gathering together of the *membra disjecta* of Western culture: Isis gathering the scattered limbs of Osiris. Equally, Butor's preoccupation with language per se, the writer's raw material, has come up repeatedly and it has seemed that, generally speaking, the works of his second period have marked a passage, where language is concerned, from transparence to opacity, or more accurately, perhaps, in a phrase of his own describing the Abbé Ralon's study window, "de la transparence à la reflection", the poles which Sartre described once as *signification* and *sens*.[8] This development in Butor's attitude to language is intimately connected with his increasing involvement with the visual arts, painting in particular, and music, though perhaps to a lesser degree.[9] At the beginning of his career, he deliberately renounced poetry, of which he wrote a good deal as a young man, in favour of the novel. He has said in a very recent interview that it is thanks to painters that he has begun to write poetry again.[10] He has long held that interaction between the arts is essential if art is not to lapse into a mere *artisanat* and presumably he feels that it is as important for the painter or the musician to read, as it is for the writer to look at pictures or to listen to music.

In this he exhibits that concern for the *integrity* of culture, in the fullest sense, which distinguishes him from so many of his contemporaries.

A writer like Jean Ricardou, on the other hand, while he does not reject the idea of an *injection culturelle*, sees its function as entirely different. In his view, "... on peut faire intervenir dans un texte des 'références culturelles' de telle manière que l'ensemble culturel lui-même en soit par contrecoup mise en cause."[11] He gives as an example his own treatment of the fourth crusade in his novel *La prise de Constantinople*. Robbe-Grillet's treatment of the *Oedipus* story in *Les Gommes* would probably be another.

As far as language is concerned, Butor and the *"nouveau" nouveau romanciers seem* to be closer in outlook than Robbe-Grillet's pronouncement might lead one to believe, but I think that the *entente* eventually turns out to be superficial. While they would appear to be equally concerned with the problem of how language gives form to our inner life, it seems to me that where for Butor the work of art *formulates* meaning, for the others it contests it. It is in a real sense a *travail de sape*[12], undermining even itself. Another difference in outlook is manifested in Butor's feeling for the visual quality of the written language[13] which does not seem to be shared by the other writers mentioned here. A comparison between one of Butor's *pages aérés* and the dense phalanx of print in *Tel Quel* say, is sufficient evidence of this.[14]

Even though Butor has explicitly acknowledged the fragmentation of culture which has characterised the twentieth century, it would appear that his attitude remains one of measured optimism. It is an over-simplification on Ricardou's part, I think, when he says:

> "La modernité se marque sans doute par les rapports conflictuels qu'elle noue avec l'ensemble culturel. Peut-être que chez Butor ce rapport n'est pas très nettement conflictuel."[15]

In trying to orient himself in the modern world, Butor wishes to help the reader to do likewise, and his apparently increasing preoccupation with language must be seen in the context of his unremitting effort to give expression to a twentieth century sensibility in a cultural setting. This involves, for him, not only stating that the centre cannot hold, but finding a new equilibrium, warding off mere anarchy with the order of art, attempting to heal the rift that has divided language into the evocative and the analytical, to reconcile the rationalising with the intuitive mind in a unity such as must have existed in primitive times.[16] Grammar, in the widest sense, interests Butor enormously, but language, for him, is more than linguistics, and its cultural reference remains a more fruitful source of inspiration than syntax.

Robbe-Grillet is right: there is *quelque chose derrière* Butor's writing but it is not a pre-existing truth which he uses language to convey. His use of language, from the first suite of novels onwards, has always been poetic, not discursive. This was not clear to some of his readers who therefore find themselves disconcerted by his later manner. "The romantic overtones of life" have gradually been stripped away. This does not mean that we are left with abstractionism or art for art's sake, but rather that we are given a measure of detachment. Poesis always gives this measure of detachment: contemplate, do not act. A work of literature has no practical function. The only thing one can do with it is to give it one's attention, and to those often brilliant *sapeurs* who challenge what they consider to be Butor's unwarranted desire for synthesis or meaning, the objection must be made that to give one's attention to something which turns out to be meaningless seems both futile and exasperating. It could be argued of course that in a world which has no meaning, art too must be meaningless, or rather that its meaning must be that the world has none. But this is not Butor's *métaphysique* and his *technique* mirrors his faith in man's ability, in spite of everything, to make chaos cosmic. Perhaps *ability* is putting it too strongly; it might be better to say *obligation*. The experience of Jacques Revel and Pierre Vernier indicates that failure is more often the lot of those who engage in such a heroic enterprise. But theirs is a heroic failure, too, and we can profit by their efforts.

What John Sturrock has called the "dialectic of presence and absence" which became evident in connection with Butor's *technique* is central to his *métaphysique*. In order for the world to be fully present to us and we to it, it is necessary for us to absent ourselves, to assume the contemplative stance. But this is an undertaking that carries great risks, as Revel and Vernier discover. While one is thus absent, life, in the words of the cliché, may pass one by. Most of us are unwilling to take such a risk; it is the artist, by his discipline and courage, who sacrifices himself for the rest of humanity. Holding this lofty view of the artist's mission, it is not surprising that Butor should be outraged by obtuse and facile criticism. He once said that his *devise* was "Laissez dire"[17] but certain remarks in his essay "La Spirale des sept péchés" reveal a less stoic attitude. He describes Flaubert's shocked reaction to the opinion of Du Camp and Bouilhet on the first version of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine:* "Nous pensons qu'il faut jeter tout cela au feu et n'en jamais reparler", and comments:

> "Extraordinaire modestie apparente de Flaubert qui conserve à ces deux personnages une amitié exemplaire. Jamais certes je n'aurais pu, après une scène pareille, accompagner un Maxime Du Camp en Egypte; même si je les avais crus, en étais venu, des années plus tard, à leur savoir gré de m'avoir, par leur intervention chirurgicale, fait découvrir ma véritable voie, et avais effectivement brûlé le manuscrit, je me serais arrangé pour ne plus les recontrer."[18]

Flaubert rejects the verdict of this Bouvard and Pecuchet, and sets to work with renewed frenzy, but to no avail, as Du Camp admits:

> "'Peine inutile! Nous ne comprenions pas, nous ne devinions pas où il voulait arriver, et, en réalité, il n'arrivait nulle part. Trois années de labeur s'écroulaient sans résultat; l'oeuvre s'en allait en fumée.'",

and Butor adds pointedly: "Rien! On croirait lire un journaliste littéraire sur certaines oeuvres d'aujourd'hui."[19]

One of the reproaches that Du Camp and Bouilhet address to *La Tentation* is that it consists in an agglomeration of:

> "'Des phrases, des phrases belles, habilement construites, harmonieuses, souvent redondantes, faites d'images grandioses et de métaphores inattendues, mais rien que des phrases que l'on pouvait transposer sans que l'ensemble du livre en fut modifié.'"[20]

"Ils attendent désespérément une histoire", Butor drily says.

It is hardly necessary to emphasise how closely Flaubert's experience resembles Butor's own, nor that there is in all of us who are not *voyants* something of what Butor calls the *cécité fondamentale* of Du Camp and Bouilhet. Our aesthetic sensibility is comparatively weak. It appears, however, that in his later work, Butor is trying to remedy this by encouraging the reader to adopt the same distance to the work as the artist does to the world, in order to bring the work into existence. He once remarked that the writer must "se mettre à l'écoute de la réalité"[21] and he returns to the metaphor of the sensitive ear in the essay on Flaubert. Energy and force of will are not enough to change our lives:

> "La partition de l'existence est là, il s'agit de l'exécuter le mieux possible; le tragique c'est l'absence d'oreille. Il en résulte en particulier qu'une décision 'énergique' ne peut pas suffire à changer la vie. Il faut entendre le changement qui se produit autour de soi, déchiffrer la partition renouvelée trop obscure pour la plupart qui en restent à une ancienne corrumpue qu'ils exécutent horriblement."[22]

Flaubert's dilemma, as Butor sees it, is also his own; is perhaps that of every serious artist:

> "C'est pour ses frères voyants, bien sûr, qu'il veut écrire, mais pour que les livres puissent aller à leur recherche, il est indespensable, ce genre de taie couvrant alors tant d'yeux, qu'ils satisfassent aussi certains aveugles;"[23].

These remarks seem particularly relevant to Butor's first four novels. Except perhaps for *Portrait de l'artiste*, however, he appears subsequently to have ceased to make any concessions to the blind in his creative writing. It may be that he felt that the early works had provided an adequate initiation, or alternatively, he grew tired of being misinterpreted. He may have believed that the novels would lead the *voyants* out of the Du Camps and Bouilhets. It seems that the experiment was not wholly successful, however, since he felt it appropriate to send to the colloquium on the new novel, a text called "Comment se sont écrits certains de mes livres", intended, evidently, to illuminate the genesis and construction of those works belonging to what one might call his third phase. The title recalls a work by Raymond Roussel, who felt obliged to offer his readers the same kind of aid, presumably for the same reasons.[24] Butor appears to oscillate between the sort of compromise he ascribed to Flaubert and the totally uncompromising attitude of Mallarmé.

I include among the works of what I have called Butor's third phase the three volumes of *Illustrations* and the second *Génie du lieu: Où*. These are in fact the works which he talks about in "Comment se sont écrits certains de mes livres". It is difficult to label them any more precisely than as "texts". The first two volumes of *Illustrations* would probably fit into what is conventionally categorised as poetry, the third contains long passages of prose, *Où* retains some of the flavour of the *études* but also bears some of the characteristics of the *Illustrations*. They are all, like the rest of Butor's work, *poetic* in the widest sense. By this I mean that they are *poesis*, not discourse, that is "forms built out of discursive language in a non-discursive way."[25] In other words, they are meaningful, but they do not convey information and if that seems contradictory, Kearns provides a convincing explanation of how it is achieved:

> "... by giving a form, a form that can be contemplated at leisure, to a piece of understanding so complex that most people would say it was instinctive or intuitive, and therefore not theoretically susceptible of being articulated. But the poet *is* poet by reason of the fact that he *can* give it an articulated form; and when he has done so, the form can be contemplated at the conscious level. Consequently, the experience which the form symbolises, has been as it were captured by the form and offered as a prize to the conscious mind. It is still a piece of *intuition* but it has been made accessible to the *intellect*, by being articulated, constructed. This seems to me to be very much what music in fact also does; it makes intuition articulate by giving it a symbolic form. Good poetry has of course always tended to do the same. But after two hundred years without any good lyric poetry to speak of, the French had tended to get into the habit of thinking that poetry was intellectually available ideas given an unusually elegant form, instead of a form given to ideas not previously available to the intellect."[26]

This last distinction is in complete harmony with Butor's aesthetics. That it is made, in this instance, with reference to the poetry of Mallarmé is appropriate, given Butor's statement: "J'ai beaucoup pratiqué Mallarmé."

"Je suis pour - aucune illustration, tout ce qu'évoque un livre devant se passer dans l'esprit du lecteur: mais, si vous remplacez la photographie, que n'allez-vous direct au cinématographe, dont le déroulement remplacera, images et texte, maint volume avantageusement."

Mallarmé

Three of Butor's most enigmatic books bear the title *Illustrations*. The fact that they are numbered I, II and III would indicate that they are intended to be a series and the remarks printed on the back cover, written by Butor himself, (a practice he first introduced with *Description de San Marco*), confirms this impression. The first volume was published in 1964, the second in 1969 and the third in 1973. It would appear then, that this *Illustrations* theme is for Butor a rich vein of inspiration since he has returned to it at such regular intervals. As always in Butor's work, the title is deserving of close examination and in this particular case it opens up an interesting perspective both on his *philosophie du livre* and his attitude to language, which are intimately related to each other.

Few writers are more sensitive to modern developments in the technique of book production than Butor. His interview with Henri Ronse, entitled appropriately, "Le livre futur", is ample evidence of this and I have quoted extensively from it in an earlier chapter. It is worthwhile to refer to it again, however, for the light it throws on

Butor's most advanced experiments with the book form.

Ronse posed a question which is a variation on the theme stated above by Mallarmé:

> "Cependant, à cet étalement sur la page, ne pourrait-on substituer celui sur l'écran, ce qui rendrait vain le recours au livre?" 27

to which Butor replied as follows:

> "Cela est vrai à première vue et c'est même ce que nous faisons aujourd'hui dans les bibliothèques lorsque nous avons à lire des livres rares, anciens et précieux: on nous en donne des microfilms. Mais ceux-ci ne permettent qu'une lecture linéaire. L'instrument reste grossier, il ne permet pas de feuilleter: ce qui est peut-être l'acte essentiel de la lecture: celui qui permet l'exploration d'un *volume*. Alors que regarder un écran c'est contempler une surface."

This statement of what Butor considers to be *l'acte essentiel de la lecture* is of the greatest importance to an understanding of the structure of his later works, which demand a development of reading technique proportionately commensurate with the systematic exploration of the resources of the book which they represent. *Feuilleter* is the key word here, a notion which also fascinated Mallarmé, and the experience of the great set-pieces, *Mobile* and *6,810,000 litres d'eau par seconde*, in particular, has shown the increased significance which accrues to this action (normally so commonplace as to escape our attention), once the concept of a rigidly linear reading is abandoned. The effect is heightened in the case of the *Illustrations*, at least as far as volumes II and III are concerned, by the fact that the different texts interlock so as to set up a complex network of reverberations which in turn gives rise to an increasingly complex manipulation of the pages. In Butor's own view, *Où* is the book which so far places the heaviest emphasis on the turning of leaves and he makes this comment the occasion of a typically astute linguistic observation which epitomises the connection between the mechanics of the book and the resources of language:

> "Dans aucun de mes livres jusqu'à present il n'y a autant d'insistance sur le fait que l'on tourne les pages, sur cette petite révolution dans laquelle on retrouve aussi celle qui est l'étymologie du mot strophe."[28]

The word *strophe* derives from the Greek *strophe*, a turning or twist; a nice illustration of the link between poetry and the physical aspect of the book, on which Mallarmé insisted so strongly.

It is instructive to contrast Butor's comparatively unfavourable assessment of microfilm *vis-à-vis* the book with the conclusion drawn by McLuhan, and other prophets of the demise of literacy, from virtually the same evidence. Butor is no Luddite; this study has produced sufficient proof of his desire to assume full possession of modern man's ever-expanding technological resources, yet he is gently insistent on the superiority of the book as instrument compared with microfilm or that other equally linear phenomenon, the tape-recording. He thus stands McLuhan's criticism of the linearity of print on its head without referring directly to it. Interestingly, Jonathan Miller, in his book on McLuhan, makes exactly the same point.[29] But the question arises of what kind of an instrument Butor understands the book to be.

This brings us back to the distinction between discourse and poesis. Clearly, Butor is not concerned with the book as an instrument of instruction, in the sense in which a text-book or a car-maintenance manual is such. This does not mean that books demand a linear reading; rather the reverse, when one considers such practices as the turning to exercises and vocabularies and the consultation of diagrams. Butor's concern, however, is with the book as an art-form whose raw material is at once abstract and concrete, that is, language, given a physical dimension, through the medium of ink on paper, cut and bound in a certain way. A title of Mallarmé's, "Le livre instrument spirituel" perhaps best sums up Butor's conception of the book and just as in the case of Mallarmé, this notion goes hand in hand with an acute awareness of what Butor has called *le physique du livre*. Mallarmé's insistence on the black and white harmonies of writing, evident in such phrases as "le vide papier que la blancheur défend", "L'encrier, cristal comme une conscience, avec sa goutte au fond, de ténèbres relative à ce que quelque chose soit", "Tu remarquas, on n'écrit pas, lumineusement sur champ obscur, l'alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s'indique, ébauché ou interrompu; l'homme poursuit noir sur blanc.",[30] is echoed in Butor's quest for that magical "goutte d'encre que je cherche depuis mon enfance, laquelle, tombant d'un pinceau sur une feuille de papier rendra soudain celle-ci toute blanche..."[31] For Butor, as for Mallarmé, writing is not a means of conveying information, hence divisible into vehicle and tenor, but "Ce pli de sombre dentelle qui retient l'infini".

In the light of Butor's confirmed belief in the flexibility of the book and his approval of the technological advances which have so dramatically increased the resources of typography and illustration, it might appear paradoxical that although three of his books are called *Illustrations*, they contain no illustrations whatsoever. Since he is prepared to exploit typography to the full, one must conclude that his abstention from the use of illustration is deliberate and aimed at achieving a definite effect. I suggest that his reason for doing so is the same as that expressed in the quotation from Mallarmé which serves as an epigraph to this section: "... tout ce qu'évoque un livre devant se passer dans l'esprit du lecteur:". The *Illustrations* series which are for the most part directly inspired by the visual arts, by eschewing pictorial illustration, are an emphatic statement of this dictum, and represent a development of the reasoning which led him to omit pictures from *Description de San Marco*. As in the case of the latter, the reader is initially frustrated, perhaps, by this lack, particularly as the works which inspired the texts are cited, but as Butor points out, with characteristic subtlety and accuracy of observation, he is, by indicating the sources of his imagery providing information which poets normally withhold. To include the works of art which inspired the poems might distract the reader's attention from the poems themselves. On the other hand, the reference to the visual arts is an integral part of the enterprise. By quoting the sources of the poems, Butor invites the reader to seek them out beyond the confines of his books, which, as befits the book-form, rely exclusively on the written language for their effect, hence his willingness to exploit the resources of typography, since by this means the book can be given a visual dimension in an appropriate medium, while its images continue to be evoked in the mind of the reader rather than graphically, on the page. This discussion may serve to elucidate the brief commentaries which appear on the back of each of the volumes of *Illustrations*, to which I referred above, and which read as follows:

"Illustrations
d'images absentes qui étaient elles-mêmes des

Illustrations
de textes absents qui seraient eux-mêmes leurs

Illustrations" (I)

"Illustrations
d'images absentes
de textes absentes
qui étaient elles-mêmes
qui étaient eux-mêmes

Des Illustrations
de textes absents
d'images absentes
qui seraient eux-mêmes
qui seraient elles-mêmes

Leurs Illustrations" (II)

"Illustrations
d'images naissantes
de textes naissants
qui seront elles-mêmes
qui seront eux-mêmes

Des Illustrations
de textes mouvants
d'images mouvantes
qui étaient eux-mêmes
qui étaient elles-mêmes

Leurs Illustrations" (III)

A detailed analysis of these three variations on a theme would provide a fruitful line of inquiry into the *Illustrations* series, with their emphasis on the dialectic between text and image, presence and absence, genesis and kinesis. The present discussion must, however, be limited to the following points.

The progression to which the three commentaries attest indicates that two of the basic premises of Butor's work still obtain, that is to say, that as in the case of the suite of novels, each ensuing book is written to resolve problems posed by its predecessor, and secondly that each work, although it may represent an integration of what has gone before, is yet capable of being itself integrated into an even greater system. Butor remarked of *Mobile:* "Le sens de la lecture était juste. Cela ne veut pas dire que je ne songe pas pour l'avenir à installer *Mobile* à l'intérieur d'un système plus vaste encore."[32] The ever-widening circle, a dominant concept in Butor's thought, also characterises the *Illustrations* series. Equally, according to Butor:

> "(un certain nombre des problèmes déjà rencontrés dans la suite des premiers romans se retrouvent à un autre niveau dans la suite d'Illustrations)."[33]

The identification and elucidation of these problems would constitute another interesting approach to the latter suite. Most important, in terms of this discussion, is that by their persistence they point to the organic nature of Butor's *oeuvre*.

The Mallarméan resonance of the three commentaries is unmistakable. The absence/presence dialectic referred to above, as well as the lack of illustrations in the accepted sense recall in particular the following paragraphs from "Variations sur un sujet":

> "A quoi bon la merveille de transposer un fait de la nature en sa presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de la parole, cependant; si ce n'est pour qu'en émane, sans la gène d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure.
>
> Je dis une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets."[34]

Perhaps the essential point to be noted about illustration as it is understood by both Butor and Mallarmé is that each of them rejects it as an explicative device. The etymology of the word indicates that it connotes a lighting up, or illumination; it derives from *illustratus*, past participle of the verb *illustrare*. There is a connection, therefore, with illumination as it is understood in what is known as an illuminated manuscript.[35] Mallarmé refers several times to this technique, always approvingly, in the course of his remarks about the book, and it would seem that he saw in typographical innovation, the modern counterpart of the elaborate script of the monks. He says, for example:

> "Pourquoi - un jet de grandeur, de pensée
> où d'émoi, considérable, phrase poursuivie,
> en gros caractère, une ligne par page
> à emplacement gradué, ne maintiendrait-il
> le lecteur en haleine, la durée du livre,
> avec appel à sa puissance d'enthousiasme:
> autour, menus, des groupes, secondairement
> d'après leur importance, explicatifs ou
> dérivés - un semis de fioritures."[36]

And again:

> "L'air ou chant sous le texte, conduisant
> la divination d'ici là, y applique son motif
> en fleuron et cul-de-lampe invisibles."[37]

Butor, writing about "Comment se sont écrits certains de mes livres," employs a vocabulary strikingly similar to Mallarmé's:

> "Chaque paragraphe du texte originel
> est ainsi entouré d'un système de
> formulations similaires: exergues, culs
> de lampe, enluminures marginales comme
> dans un manuscrit de la fin du moyen age,
> dans lequel certains mots sont soumis à
> un éclairage intense, leur figure étant
> en quelque sorte amarrée par le filin
> des bribes de phrases qui flottent dans
> la page à la recherche de leur continuité.
> En lisant maintenant ce premier paragraphe
> en entier, on verrait comment s'y produisent
> les phénomènes d'illustration, de mise en
> espace où volume."[38]

It is clear from this that illustration for Butor, as for Mallarmé, is an integral part of the *text itself*. The written language provides its own illustration, an achievement which cannot be divorced from the *mise en volume*, hence from the *acte essentiel de la lecture - feuilleter*. I have already referred to the etymology of the word *strophe*, pointing out that it meant a turning. Specifically, it denoted in the Ancient Greek theatre, the movement of the chorus in turning from the right to the left of the stage, hence the part of the choric song performed during this. Butor's linking of the strophe with the turning of the page harmonises very well with the following short observation of Mallarmé concerning *le volume*: "Le sens enseveli se meut et dispose, en choeur, des feuillets."[39]

The expression *cul-de-lampe* is a particularly interesting one in the context of the present discussion, since it has both typographical and architectural connotations. It may mean either a *tailpiece*, that is to say an ornamental design or engraving which the printer puts at the end of the chapter or at the bottom of a page, or a *pendant*: a decorative piece suspended from a ceiling or a roof, used especially in Gothic architecture. It is more than likely that Butor, with his insistence on the book as a volume, in the fullest sense, had both of these connotations in mind.

Butor's *Illustrations* series are an attempt to breach what he has called "le mur fondamental édifiée par notre enseignement entre les lettres et les arts."[40] This objective was also, implicitly at least, Mallarmé's, whose artistic effort was bent toward demonstrating that, in Suzanne Langer's words, "Poetry generates its own entire world, as painting generates its entire continuum of space."[41] Butor's conception of literature as *spatialisation*, discussed in an earlier chapter, is intimately bound up with the manner in which his later works are linked with the visual arts, while remaining themselves devoid of illustration. The essential reason for Butor's and Mallarmé's refusal of the latter is probably expressed in the following observation by an authority on prints:

> "In general the principle function of illustration has been the conveyance of information. The graphic processes and techniques have grown and developed to the end of conveying information."[42]

Butor seems to be emphasising that neither painting nor literature shares this function, either separately or in relation to each other, and yet "toute notre expérience de la peinture comporte en fait une considérable partie verbale."[43], to which the *Illustrations* necessarily contributes. However, Butor's poems are not commentaries, but works of art in their own right; opaque, not transparent. They are not illustrations in the accepted sense, in that they are non-explicative, just as the works of art which inspired them are, hence the refusal to use the latter in an explicative way - as illustrations. The relationship between the poems and their *images absentes* would seem rather to be an amalgam of the links between a literary work or a painting and its title, which Butor has described as follows in *Les Mots dans la peinture*:

> "Toute oeuvre littéraire peut être considérée comme formée de deux textes associés: le corps (essai, roman, drame sonnet) et son titre, poles entre lesquels circule une électricité de sens...; de même l'oeuvre picturale se présente toujours pour nous comme l'association d'une image, sur toile, planche, mur ou papier, et d'un nom, celui-ci fut-il vide, en attente, pure énigme, réduit à un simple point d'interrogation." (P. 8).

Pointing out that artists have sometimes delegated the naming of their paintings to poets, as was the case with the surrealists, for example, Butor insists that this practice in no way diminishes the force or the unity of the work:

> "Car ce n'est pas seulement la situation culturelle de l'oeuvre, tout le contexte dans lequel elle se présente à nous qui est transformé par le titre: la signification de cette organisation de formes et couleurs change tout au long de la compréhension parfois fort progressive de ces quelques mots, mais cette organisation change aussi." (P. 17).

It is just such an interaction between language and the visual arts which the *Illustrations* exemplify, in contrast to the coffe-table book in which "l'illustration paraît dans son emboîtage de commentaires". (Pp. 18-19).

They derive from the same attitude to literature which animated Mallarmé's work, an attitude to which Suzanne Langer has given eloquent expression:

> "Poetry, like all art, is abstract and meaningful; it is organic and rhythmic, like music, and imaginal, like painting. It springs from the power of language to formulate the appearance of reality, a power fundamentally different from the communicative function, however involved with it in the evolution of speech. The pure product of the formulative use of language is verbal creation, composition, art; not statement, but *poesis*."[44]

The dedication to *Illustrations I*, "au compositeur" is rich in implication, emphasising at once the importance which Butor attaches to the physical aspect of the book, to its poetic and visual power, and the ambiguity of the word, which may mean "compositor" or "composer". A hint perhaps that a book, like a painting, creates a new space; it is a composition in black and white.

Butor has covered a great deal of ground since *Passage de Milan*, but his progress has been in the nature of a periplum in so far as later developments in his work were already potentially present in his first novel, so that in pursuing them, he is at once forging ahead and working his way back to the source. In attempting to follow his progress, I have pursued several avenues of approach and neglected, consciously and unconsciously, many others. The drama of criticism lies in the fact that a choice must be made, and that once made, it automatically eliminates all other possibilities. The question then arises as to how one can be sure of having made the right one. The answer is that one cannot. But in the work of collaboration which is criticism as Butor understands it, and as I have tried to practise it in this study, perhaps there is no rigidly defined right and wrong approach, provided the basic requirement of opening oneself to the work is met. The principle demand that Butor makes of his readers is that they be "bien disposés". As he remarked to Madeleine Chapsal

> "J'ai eu moi-même beaucoup de mal à faire le livre, bien des choses ont ete compliquéés. Aussi j'aime le lecteur qui considère normal de rencontrer lui aussi des difficultés à me lire. Il est de mon côté , il me fait confiance, il participe à ma création, même si si je ne l'ai jamais vu..."[45]

Given this basic good will, Butor seems prepared to allow the personality and cast of mind of the individual critic and reader a great deal of latitude in the interpretation of his work.

"Try your own way to find my ways."

Butor

This invitation at once sums up Butor's demands on his readers and gives succinct expression to his own attitude vis-à-vis the work of other artists, as exemplified in the *Répretoire* series, and in a different key, in the three volumes of *Illustrations*. It is an invitation which advocates freedom but not licence, opening the work of art to a variety of approaches but denying facility, insisting that it is a Significant Form yet emphasising that the reader's active participation is necessary if it is to be such for more than the artist himself. It is a capsule description of the spirit in which this study was undertaken, and it is an aphoristic expression of a long-standing problem: in what measure ought subjectivity and objectivity be combined in our response to a work of art and in what measure does this response conflict with or confirm the response of other reader/viewers and the original intention of the artist himself; in other words, the problem of meaning.

> "A work of art consists of bits: the bits may be words, or musical notes, or pieces of stone, or wood, or patches of colour or movements; and so on. There is only one thing all art forms have in common - that you recognize the bits to have been put together by a controlling mind - and you do this because you see them as fitting

> together in a way that seems significant. *Anything* can suddenly seem intensely significant to one individual. However, a work of art is judged great when a lot of people find it significant every time they give their attention to it. One could go farther and say that many people feel that the sense of significance they are getting from it is shared fairly exactly by others who give their attention to it... One thing is sure, if it appears meaningless to us, then for us, at the moment, it is not art. Music that we find meaningless to us we describe as noise."[46]

This is relevant to the reception which is given to all new developments in art, which frequently give rise to two opposing yet related attitudes on the part of the public: on the one hand outright rejection of any work which is not rigorously traditional and on the other an equally unthinking acceptance of every novelty, a phenomenon exemplified by the tale of the Emperor's new clothes. It might be instructive to consider, at this point, whether, in following Butor's latest advances, one is not in danger of committing the latter error, which in turn raises the question of whether in trying one's own way to find his ways, one's capacity to be critical of the work, in the sense of casting a cold eye on it, becomes dormant.

There is no doubt that few writers have made more stringent demands on their readers than Butor. The attention and concentration that his works require recall Joyce's vision of the ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia, who would devote his entire life to the reading of his books. This implies that the writer commits his entire life to the writing of them, if the exchange is to be a fair one, and that is indeed the case as far as Joyce and Butor particularly are concerned. Both demand a high degree of loyalty and perseverance from their readers but not proportionately more than the loyalty to the artistic vision and perseverance in the effort to give expression to it that they themselves have demonstrated. What is required of the reader, therefore, in the last analysis, is no more than an appreciation of the seriousness of the artist's purpose, trust in his integrity and the humility to acknowledge that his understanding may surpass our own. Jean-Pierre Richard, in his masterly study of Mallarmé, gives this description of the attitude required. Emphasising that "toute compréhension est nécessairement subjective", he goes on to say:

> "L'esprit ne possédera une oeuvre, une page, une phrase, un mot même qu'à condition de reproduire en lui (et il n'y parvient jamais absolument) l'acte de conscience dont ils constituent l'écho. ... Point de déchiffrement poétique sans une sorte d'adhésion préalable, et quasi passionnelle au texte à déchiffrer."[47]

If we accept the view that if when we look at a work of art and find it meaningless, then either it is an abortive piece of work or we have failed to read it correctly, the attitude advocated by Richard deals effectively with the second of these alternatives. The first, however, remains, together with its corollary: how is one to determine whether the work of art under consideration is an abortive piece of work?

If a definitive answer can be given to this question, and that is doubtful, it is necessary first of all to establish that it has nothing to do with the maintenance of standards. The following remarks concerning prints, or duplicate pictures, are interesting in this regard and recall what was said about Butor's *Illustrations* in the last section of this chapter:

> "It is worthwhile to think how few of the reproductive and professional print makers of the past are remembered. They have been forgotten precisely because they standardised their quality and maintained their standards... Every new tool or material, every new process and every change in religious or social theory and habit introduces change that is incompatible with 'maintenance of standards'."[48]

If, as in Butor's opinion, the artist is he who "se met à l'écoute de la réalité", whose sensitive ear is attuned to every modulation in the score of existence, his work will necessarily defy standardisation. The same authority on prints quoted above has also remarked that:

> "In the long run the illustrator has made his pictures not to suit himself but to serve the ends of his employers and the

> needs, real or fancied, of the community, in the elucidation of a text."[49]

The difference between the illustrator and the artist is that the latter works primarily to suit himself, in order that he himself may arrive at understanding.

"Lorsque j'écris", Butor has said,"le monde se révèle sous mes doigts."[50]Ideally, this same revelation should be generated by the act of reading but that communion with it through the work of art is achieved by reproducing within ourselves *l'acte de conscience* of which the work is the echo. Mallarmé was talking about the same thing when he wrote:

> "Le reploiement vierge du livre, encore, prête à un sacrifice dont saigna la tranche rouge des anciens tomes; l'introduction d'une arme, ou coupe-papier, pour établir la prise de possession. Combien personelle plus avant, la conscience, sans ce simulacre barbare: quand elle se fera participation, au livre d'ici, pris de là, varié en airs, deviné comme une énigme - presque refait par soi."[51]

For him, the desire to possess the work of art does violence to it. (The imagery he uses is strongly sexual.) Possession in terms of the work of art, intellectually and emotionally speaking, means attempting to explain it away, an operation which Mallarmé explicitly condemns:

> "Coupable qui, sur cet art, avec cécité opérera un dédoublement: ou en sépare, pour les réaliser dans une magie à côté, les délicieuses, pudiques - pourtant exprimables métaphores."[52]

This desire to explain art away was described by Roger Fry as the "process of assimilation of the work of art to the needs of the instinctive life.", and his discussion of this phenomenon is relevant to the problem which is being considered here. Arguing that the average man uses art entirely for its symbolic value, and that the social man lives in a world of symbols, finding in art "his richest reservoir of symbolic currency", Fry declares that:

> "... in a world of symbolists the creative artist and the creative man of science appear in strange isolation as the only people who are not symbolists. They alone are up against certain relations which do not stand for something else, but appear to have ultimate value, to be real.
>
> Art as a symbolic currency is an important means of the instinctive life of man, but art as created by the artist, is in violent revolt against the instinctive life, since it is an expression of the reflective and fully conscious life."[53]

It is this effort at assimilation that is at the root of the form/content dichotomy referred to in an earlier chapter, and which Mallarmé deliberately tried to frustrate. The obscurity of his poetry was intended to bring the reader up short, to deny him immediate refuge in the literal meaning, with the result that, after hours of attention, the *total* meaning might dawn on him first and perhaps eventually he might cease to think in terms of literal and symbolic meaning altogether.

It would seem that when a work of art expresses some new vision it is resisted by the public because of what Fry calls its "too violent assertion of its own reality." Like truth, it must undergo a process of deformation before it is assimilable to the instinctive life, and this deformation, in the case of the work of art, takes the form of travesty.

> "Travesty is necessary at first to make it assimilable but in the end long familiarity may rob even original works of art of their insistence, so that, finally, even the great masterpieces may become the cherished symbols of the lords of the instinctive life - may, as in fact they frequently do, become the property of millionaires."[54]

Although Fry's remarks are specifically addressed to painting, they are equally applicable to the process undergone by the novel, as discussed in the introduction to this study.

When therefore one is attempting to decide if a work of art be good, it is necessary to take precautions against judging it in terms of what Fry calls the instinctive life. But increasingly, it seems, a facile acceptance of every new development in art is as frequent a reaction among the public as outrage was hitherto. This is the opinion of Mircea Eliade who claims that the dire consequences for collectors and museums of their indifference to movements such as Impressionism and Cubism taught a hard lesson to the public and the critics no less than to art dealers and curators. The result is that:

> "Aujourd'hui, leur seule terreur est de ne pas être suffisamment avancés, de ne pas deviner à temps le génie dans une oeuvre à première vue inintelligible. Jamais peut-être dans l'histoire l'artiste n'a été plus certain qu'aujourd'hui que, plus il est audacieux, iconoclaste, absurde, inaccessible, plus il sera reconnu, loué, gâté, idolatré. Dans certains pays on en est arrivé à un académisme à rebours, l'académisme de l''avant-garde'; à tel point que toute expérience artistique ne tenant pas compte de ce nouveau conformisme risque d'être étouffée ou de passer inaperçue."[55]

Eliade argues that perhaps for the first time in the history of art the tension between artist and public no longer exists. That would seem to be open to doubt, in Butor's case at least, if we take into account the adverse criticism he has received from the Establishment. However, Eliade's point about *l'académisme de l'avant-garde* is well-taken, and Butor's treatment at the colloquium on the new novel at Cérisy-la-Salle would seem to indicate the existence of a *nouveau conformisme.*

Butor is essentially a non-conformist; he describes himself as "étant allergique à tout embrigadement."[56], and he has resisted assimilation into any school. Likewise, he finds the militaristic ring of the term *avant garde* distasteful and he has specifically denied that he is an iconoclast. However, his non-conformism operates equally in regard to *l'académisme* proper as it does to *l'académisme* *à rebours*, and the challenge that his work represents is well expressed in the title of a recent collection of poetry: *Travaux d'approche*.

This title, which must be ranked among the most successful in Butor's impressive repertoire, tells us a great deal about his attitude to his writing, to contemporary art and to his public. Specifically, *Travaux d'approche* means the "work of demolition and entrenchment by which beseigers advance, trench-work". In an illuminating interview with Roger Borderie which serves as a preface to the book, Butor describes his two-pronged attack on the traditional genres, which he conducts by:

> "d'abord en affirmant qu'il est possible d'inventer et de pratiquer d'autres genres que ceux proposés par les cours de littérature ... et en montrant que depuis longtemps (au moins le milieu du xix^{e} siecle) la littérature française pratique en réalité d'autres genres que ceux dont on parle et qui nous empêchent de voir les vrais." (Pp. 7-8).

It is not sufficient, he argues, to refuse to work with genres which are out of date, expressions of a society which no longer exists, but whose passing people are reluctant to acknowledge; "il faut essayer de prendre des genres littéraires d'avance." In order to do this it is essential to bring what is actually being done, though in what Butor calls a semi-clandestine fashion, into the open, so that it can fulfill its function. Otherwise these unacknowledged genres are difficult to surpass. "Il faut d'abord les soigner, les aider à s'accomplir, leur faire donner toute leur mesure, pour réussir ensuite à les bien tuer." (P. 8). Perhaps this rather brutal statement presents an answer to Eliade's fears about what he considers to be the increasing gullibility of the public. If it also indicates an unwarranted faith in the capacity of art for infinite progress, this may be tempered by the fact that, as Butor himself points out: "Certains de mes genres s'enracinent dans la classification traditionnelle: ainsi les 'romans', les 'essais'." (P. 10).

It would appear that one possible way to deal with a new artistic vision, or genre, is to give it the close attention advocated by Jean-Pierre Richard, and then to let it develop, as Butor recommends; in effect, giving it enough rope to hang itself, if it is spurious, or permitting it to provide the basis for further artistic effort if it is fruitful. This last development will, of course, be in the hands of the artist, not of the public, whose only real obligation toward art is to give it its attention. Once, in fact, the notion of maintenance of standards is abandoned, the question of determining if a work of art is abortive fades into the background, even for professional critics. Butor regards the critic's prime task as putting the public in touch with art. It follows that this is impossible in the case of a work which the critic himself finds incomprehensible. It would seem, therefore, that if a work seems meaningless to us after we have given it our attention, the answer is not condemnation. We can return to it again, if we are sufficiently interested. It may be that our cultural context is inadequate so that we approach the work in the wrong frame of mind. The critic cannot induce the unreceptive or the uneducated to appreciate a work of art by trying to convince them. If the artist could not do so then the critic cannot either. What he can do, however, is to help them to cultivate the right frame of mind and to modify their cultural context, and, given time to absorb the relevant cultural context, anyone can understand any work of art for himself.

Butor's title: *Travaux d'approche*, though it has aggressive overtones, is also suggestive of such a narrowing of the gap between a work of art and its public, perhaps between the artist and his public as well. The last piece, *Blues des projets*, is among the most overtly autobiographical he has written, to the point of incorporating interventions (albeit fictitious), by his wife and four daughters . The idea of progress and *approach* is reinforced by the three divisions into which the book falls, which are entitled: *Eocene, Miocene, Pliocene*, respectively. These terms refer to Geological periods in the Cenozoic era, indicating progressive stages in the earth's development and in the evolution of man. During the Pliocene epoch, modern plants and animals developed. The works assembled in *Travaux d'approche* are arranged chronologically and provide a capsule chart of Butor's development as an artist. Since only *Blues des projets* falls into the Pliocene division, it is legitimate to conclude that it provides a reliable indication of the future trend of Butor's work. The number of projects which have to do with works of art from earlier periods is therefore remarkable, or rather it would be remarkable if one was not aware of the delicate balance Butor maintains between tradition and innovation.

His preoccupation with fertile interaction between works of art is also hinted at in the title *Travaux d'approche*, and borne out in the book itself. In this case it is his own works which are juxtaposed and which interact, suffer that *travail d'approche* which the essence of a *recueil*. But this genre, too, "à quoi se rattachent généralement les ouvrages poètiques à partir du xix^{e} siècle." (P. 10), Butor holds up to the light, as it were, so that new possibilities are revealed:

> "Je ne puis me contenter d'accumuler des textes déjà publies par ailleurs. Je veux faire du rassemblement lui-même un travail original." (P. 10),

he says.

First of all there is the element of choice, the prime factor in any anthology, and then the question of revision. For Butor, the latter is frequently carried to the length of completely re-writing the original, but this has not always been the case. As he himself points out, the series of *Répertoires* are "presque des recueils classiques" whereas the *Illustrations* "constituent des recueils d'un type nouveau qui tendent, je l'espère, à ébranler la notion même de recueil." (P. 11). It is significant that the first anthology of his poetry to be published: *La banlieu de l'aube à l'aurore*, contained a second piece entitled *Mouvement brownien*. The Brownian movement, named after the Scottish botanist who discovered it, is "the peculiar random movement exhibited by particles of both organic and inorganic substances when suspended in liquids or gases that is caused by the impact of the molecules of fluid surrounding the particles". Butor describes how he applies this principle to literature in the preface to *Travaux d'approche*, as follows:

> "Au lieu d'être fixés définitivement (admirablement fixés parfois comme dans une inscription) les mots peuvent atteindre un état supérieur dans lequel ils éveillent perpétuellement d'autres mots. Quelque chose en eux frémit. C'est se que tentait d'évoquer le titre *Mouvement brownien*."(P. 17).

But this appears to apply not only on the scale of individual words, but of entire texts as well, as for example in the case of the *Illustrations*. "J'ai été très préoccupé,

tous ces temps derniers", Butor has declared, "par la question de *l'ouverture* du volume, par la mise en question de la distinction entre le singulier et le pluriel, entre un texte (le livre) et plusieurs textes (le recueil)." (TA, 11).

This development would seem to be a ramification of the movement from the singular to the plural marked by that pivotal book, *Degrés*. Manifested in Butor's most recent works at a rigorously textual level, it still seems to give expression to a trend in literature elucidated by Harry Levin in his book on Joyce, which has contributed so many useful insights for this study. Speaking of the abandonment of naturalism in favour of symbolism, and the charges of *Kulturbolschewismus* that this movement elicited, he discusses the conclusions drawn by Edmund Wilson in *Axel's Castle*, which "posited the need for a stronger sense of social responsibility, and seemed to suggest that it could be met by reversion to some naiver plane of naturalism." However, Levin declares, "Our miscalculations were based on the assumption that symbolism is more individualistic than naturalism. The contrary, we are beginning to see, is nearer the truth." In his opinion, the novel, essentially the chronicle of separate existences, was challenged by the industrial revolution, with its emphasis on the "democratic" and "en masse" and the novelist was confronted with a hard choice: protest or escape. But just as the social protest of the realists indicates individualism, since they stand back from society in order to criticise it, so the escape into introspection is actually, in Levin's phrase, "a sensitive gauge of external forces". Levin writes:

> "Many of our most subjective writers, without reversing their course, have found within themselves the keys to a broader objectivity. They have found themselves consciously moving from the slippery regions of psychology to the *terra firma* of anthropology. They have learned that the infancy of the human race is recapitulated in the infancy of the individual, and that myths are collective dreams. Science, it seems, is on the side of symbolism after all."[57]

Taking Thomas Mann as an example, Levin describes his development as an artist in a phrase from Mann's lecture on Freud: "'from the bourgeois and individual to the typical and mythical.'". The phrase could equally well be applied to Joyce. It could also be applied to Butor, whose affinity with the Irish writer has been frequently pointed out here. It appears that the contradiction posited by Roger Fry between the symbolist public and the realist artist (in the particular sense which he attributes to these terms) can therefore be resolved. While it may be true that as art becomes purer it appeals more specifically to the aesthetic sensibility, it does not appeal to it exclusively. It strikes a deep chord in our common humanity. As Levin puts it:

> "In fear and trembling, we pay belated homage to the idols of the tribe. In the paintings of Picasso's negro period or Stravinsky's *Sacre du printemps* we recognise the fructifying resources of primitivism, and we feel its destructive menace in the headlines of the morning papers."[58]

However cerebral and difficult of access Butor's later works may appear, they are in close contact, at a profound level, with the realities of life in the twentieth century. His latest advances in *technique* are expressive of a *métaphysique* which is consonant with an era which George Steiner has called a post-culture, in which:

> "A common formlessness or search for new forms has all but undermined classic age-lines, sexual divisions, class structures and hierarchic gradients of mind and power. We are caught in a Brownian movement at every vital, molecular level of individuation and society."[59]

Failure to grasp the sense of Butor's effort is a failure to seize our own cultural context. We must learn to become his contemporaries.

In opting, like Joyce, for the Religion of Art, Butor too establishes contact with a profound, not to say primitive, religious current in humanity. The challenge which his work presents has no doubt a good deal to do with what Mircea Eliade has described as "la fonction redemptrice de la difficulté!" In his view:

> "... la fascination par la difficulté, voire l'incompréhensibilité des oeuvres d'art, trahit le désir de découvrir un nouveau sens, secret, inconnu jusqu'alors, du Monde et de l'existence humaine."[60]

This search for a gnosis mirrors Butor's own, the process which gave birth to his works, and in which therefore, the reader is invited actively to participate. Referring to "la formule de la demande" which is a characteristic feature of *Blues des projets*, Butor writes:

> "Ma propre demande est réverberée, renvoyée par la demande qui s'adresse à moi, assignée de l'impossibilité définitive dans laquelle je me trouve d'y satisfaire, cette autre demande qui n'est plus la mienne ni celle de personne, cette sorte de demande généralisée à l'intérieur de laquelle tout le monde se débat."[61]

Given the heroic devotion that Butor gives to his art and the strenuous efforts he has repeatedly made to help the reader to an understanding of it, negative criticism, particularly on the grounds of obscurity, seems inappropriate. But it is not only to an understanding of his work that Butor wishes to guide the reader, but to an understanding of the world itself. It seems that he is striving to realise Mallarmé's ambition to achieve that "Grande Oeuvre":

> "qui soit *un livre, architectural et prêmedité*, et non un recueil des inspirations de hasard fussent-elles merveilleuses ... L'explication orphique de la Terre, qui est le seul devoir du poète et le jeu littéraire par excellence: car le rythme même du livre, alors impersonnel et vivant ... se juxtapose aux equations de ce rêve, ou Ode."[62]

The scope of this task is only equalled by the dedication and courage which Butor brings to it. We have never been more in need of an interpreter, in this world of chaos and old night. That Butor has assumed that difficult role is a testimony to the high morality of his art. We must learn to understand him.

[1] - *La Banlieue de l'aube à l'aurore, Mouvement brownien* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1968).

- *Illustrations 2*, Collection 'Le Chemin' (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). *Les Mots dans la peinture* (Geneve, Collection 'Les Sentiers de la creation', Skira).

- *La Rose des vents. Trente-deux Rhumbs pour Charles Fourier*, Collection 'Le Chemin' (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). *Arc* no. 39, numero spécial conçu par Michel Butor, 1970.

- *Où, Le Génie du lieu, 2* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

- *Dialogue avec trente-trois variations de Ludwig von Beethoven sur une valse de Diabelli*, Collection 'Le Chemin' (Paris: Gallimard 1971).

- *Les sept femmes de Gilbert le Mauvais (Autre Heptaèdre)* (Paris: Fata Morgana 1972).

- *Travaux d'approche*, poèmes, Collection *Poésie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).

- *Illustrations 3*, Collection 'Le Chemin', (Paris: Gallimard 1973).

- *Intervalle* (Paris: Gallimard 1973).

[2] See for example, the review by Robert Kanters of *Intervalle* and *Illustrations 3*, "Faites vous-même un roman de Michel Butor" *Le Figaro*, 2 juin 1973.

[3] See *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui, 1, Problèmes Généraux*, particularly the summing-up by Françoise Van Rossum-Guyon.

[4] *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui, 2, Pratiques*, p. 286. It is significant that Butor did not attend the colloquium in person and his work was given rather scanty treatment. This omission was made good the following year when a colloquium was held exclusively on Butor. According to Professor F. C. St. Aubyn, who was involved, "The Butor colloquium was held because so many of us felt that he had been slighted in the one on the 'new novel'." (Letter to me, 31st Jan. 1974). The proceedings of this colloquium will be published shortly in the *10 18* collection, complete with a bibliography of Butor's work 1945-1972, by Professor St. Aubyn.

[5] Ibid., p. 284.

[6] At the colloquium on the novel, Robbe-Grillet related the following anecdote, taken he says, from Kafka's journal: "Personne ne songerait à monter sur une scène devant un vaste public pour simplement casser des noix, mais si quelqu'un le faisait, c'est qu'il y aurait quelque chose derrière...", p. 280.

[7] *Nouveau Roman*, p. 280 and 284.

[8] See *Situations 2*, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?"

[9] The three volumes of *Illustrations* were almost exclusively inspired by the visual arts, painting, engraving or photography. *Les Mots dans la peinture* speaks for itself. *Où* contains a text called "35 vues du Mont Sandia le soir l'hiver", a title which recalls the work of Hokusai. There is one text directly inspired by music, the *Dialogue avec trente-trois variations*. He has composed a libretto for the opera *Votre Faust*, in collaboration with Henri Pousseur.

10 "Michel Butor, artist's author," in interview with Jacques Michel, *Le Monde*, English section, *The Guardian*, September 1973, p. 14.

[11] *Nouveau Roman*, p. 281.

[12] This phrase was inappropriately applied to Butor once, by a reviewer of *Degrés*, Matthieu Galey, in *Arts*, no. 758, Jan. 1960. An interesting commentary on the undermining of fictions in Robbe-Grillet's work may be found in Robert Champigny's article "Histoire et roman," *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. VII, no. 2, Summer 1967, pp. 91-101.

[13] See Raillard, p. 267:

> Butor - "Le mot n'est pas seulement un signe sonore, c'est aussi un signe visuel; il a dans une large mesure les mêmes propriétés que les autres signes visuels.
> L La collaboration avec les peintres et les musiciens m'a toujours été très profitable, m'ouvrant de nouvelles zones d'imagination."

[14] The density of a *Tel Quel* page is doubtless willful and aimed at a certain effect, but the emphasis is intellectual, rather than visual.

[15] *Nouveau Roman*, p. 282.

[16] For a discussion of the developing dichotomy of language, see E. G. Kearns, "'Discursive Meaning' and 'Musical Meaning' in the Romantic theory of art, an Essay chiefly concerning Mallarmé," *Durham University Journal*, December 1972, New Series Vol. XXXIV No. 1, pp. 65-79.

[17] "Michel Butor répond au questionnaire Marcel Proust" (ds. Livres de France, juin-juillet), *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 15 juin 1963.

> "Ce que je voudrais être? Mieux logé. Ce que je déteste par-dessous tout? Aller chez le dentiste. Le fait militaire que j'admire le plus? J'ai beaucoup de mal à éprouver de l'admiration pour quelque chose militaire. Etat présent de mon esprit? En plein fonctionnement. Votre idéal de bonheur terrestre? Travailler tranquillement. Ma devise? Laissez dire".

[18] "La Spirale des sept péchés," *Critique* 26, no. 276, mai 1970, pp. 387-412. (P. 387).

[19] P. 388

[20] P. 389

[21] See Charbonnier, p. 27.

[22] "La Spirale des sept péchés," p. 390.

[23] P. 388.

[24] Roussel's book was, however, called *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*. The change Butor has made in the title is significant but somewhat ambiguous. Does

his use of the reflexive verb suggest that the subject of the books dictated their form? But surely he retained some control? He is perhaps simply drawing attention to the *organic* nature of his most recent works even at the expense of refining himself out of existence.

[25] Kearns, op. cit., p. 73.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Henri Ronse, op. cit., p. 104.

[28] *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui*, p. 253.

[29] Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan*, Fontana Great Masters Series (London : Fontana/Collins, I97I), P. II3.

[30] Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 38, p. 370.

[31] Butor, "Le Foyer," *Illustrations III*, p. 19. I have already referred to this piece in another context. Its title recalls the discussion of the multivalent use of the word *foyer* in *Degrés*. Its association here with a magical *goutte d'encre* is reminiscent of Sartre's remarks in *Les Mots* regarding the bourgeois school-boy's ambition to be a writer.

[32] Henri Ronse, op. cit., p. 107.

[33] *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui*, p. 251.

[34] Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 368.

[35] This recalls Rimbaud's collection of poems in prose, *Illuminations*, which certain texts of Butor's, notably in *Illustrations III*, somewhat resemble, in lay-out and *souffle*, at least. "Le Foyer" would be a case in point.

[36] Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 381 and p. 387.

[37] Mallarmé, p. 387.

[38] Butor, *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui*, p. 245.

[39] Mallarmé, p. 372.

[40] Butor, *Les Mots dans la peinture*, p. 7.

[41] Suzanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art*, Ten Philosophical Lectures (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 159-160.

[42] William M. Ivins, Jr., *How Prints Look*, Photographs with a Commentary, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Beacon Press, Boston, 1958).

[43] Butor, *Les Mots dans la peinture*, p. 8.

[44] Langer, op. cit., p. 160.

[45] Chapsal, p. 66.

[46] E. C. Kearns, op. cit., p. 67.

[47] Jean-Pierre Richard, *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1961), p. 36.

[48] Ivins, op. cit., p. 149.

[49] Ivins, op. cit., p. 143.

[50] Ronse, op. cit., p. 107.

[51] Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 381.

[52] Mallarmé, p. 400.

[53] Roger Fry, "Art and Socialism," *Vision and Design* (London: 1920; rpt. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1961), p. 65.

[54] Fry, loc. cit.

[55] Mircea Eliade, *Aspects du mythe*, Collection Idées, (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp. 226-227.

[56] *Travaux d'approche*, p. 15.

[57] Harry Levin, op. cit., p. 209.

[58] Levin, p. 210.

[59] George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some notes towards the Re-definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 67.

[60] Eliade, op. cit., p. 228.

[61] *Travaux d'approche*, p. 15.

[62] Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p.663.

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Appendix 1. *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*

At the Colloquium, *Michel Butor and Visual Arts*, held at The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 24th – 26th April 1974, I learned that the two castles mentioned in *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe* actually exist. These are the châteaux of Harburg (H) and Weisenstein (W) and apparently they correspond very closely with the description given of them in Butor's *capriccio*. Professor Jennifer Waelti Walters, in the course of her paper, "Le Musée butorien", gave a fascinating account of her pilgrimage to both of them.